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CROSSOVERS, **p.68** *answered* ➡ WHY CHINA
IS THE AUTO INDUSTRY'S NEW DETROIT, **p.23**
discovered ➡ 20 NEW NASCAR RULES, **p.18**



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editor's

LETTER

What's that adage about never working with kids or animals?

We often go to ridiculous lengths to get you the story, and I do stress ridiculous. For this month's eight-way mini-ute comparo ["The (Just) O.K. Corral," page 68], your editors found themselves in Maysville, Kentucky, 70 miles northeast of Lexington, where the currency is bourbon, horses, basketball, and Clooneys, who are the indigenous celebrities. We needed the first two—a horse farm for the equine-themed story's opening shot, and bourbon because it makes life worth living. But first we needed lunch.

We stopped at a very smart-looking establishment on U.S. 68 named deSha's and tucked in. The executive chef, Randy Cooper, approached and, sensing a northerly disturbance in his restaurant's energy field, asked what brought us in. "We're from *Car and Driver*," barked Dan Winter, our former assistant art director and resolute comparo-mate, "and we need a horse."

That is when it started to get weird. Apparently, you can roll into a family restaurant in northern Kentucky and walk out with Secretariat. Ordering up a filly down there was no harder than ordering lunch. Okay, bad analogy. I leaned over to another comparo stalwart, Lotus engineer George Riehl, and asked, "Am I having an auditory hallucination, or did he just say he'd get us a horse?"

Cooper called up Duff Giffen, the city's director of tourism, who came by just as we were settling our bill. Fun, vivacious, and well turned out, she said, "I have a couple of horse farms in mind, but there's one just up the road that I want you to see first." That's service!

The farm, owned by Doug and Kate Hendrickson, sits serenely behind a couple of new-home developments. Reached at the end of a long, tree-lined driveway, the 400-acre farm comprises a series of large corrals hemmed in by the kind of brown wooden fences you see in Kentucky tourism one-pagers.

Five horses were standing at the far end of one corral, but they trotted over to get fed as soon as they achieved radar lock. We obliged with some Funyuns and breath mints. (Just kidding, Mr. Hendrickson.) Giffen said, "These horses are ridden by kids in the neighborhood. Tennessee walkers, appaloosas, one paint, and one thoroughbred—they're all friendly." We asked her where we could get some apples and carrots, and she wrinkled her nose and produced them. (A trip to the store also may have been involved, but we were too busy trying to

took a whiff of the CR-V's hood and bolted away in the opposite direction. We whipped out the apples and carrots. The horses began encroaching like zombies.

One gelding took our feed and then moved on to the Mitsubishi's side-view mirror, gnawing away robotically. Another, his appetite whetted by the canapés, started foraging at the hood of the RAV4 with his teeth, scratching down to the primer. All began relieving themselves in symphonic rondo.

Slowly, and without us quite realizing it,



Apparently, you can roll into a family restaurant in northern Kentucky and walk out with Secretariat.

start the old Ford tractors on the property, hoping to do a little farm-implement jousting.)

We opened up the large central corral and parked the eight vehicles in an art-directed arrangement. Photographer Marc Urbano and creative director Darin Johnson set up their cameras right where the fencing formed a short, square bottleneck.

The horses approached the parked utes cautiously but with a high level of curiosity, as if to ask, *So these are the things that replaced us?* One was morbidly flatulent and milled about in the bottleneck behind the camera. Another

these sheetmetal snackers had pushed us back into the corner of the fence. They began traipsing in front of us, nudging us with their bulk and peppering us with belches and farts and sounds so unnatural I thought they had come from the tractors.

Urbano leapt up onto the fence behind him, claiming to need a higher vantage point but clearly propelled skyward by a mixture of professionalism and good old-fashioned freakout.

Like I said, it got weird. But it was a providential weirdness. Need I mention we got the shot? 🍷

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EDITORIAL OFFICE 1585 Eisenhower Place, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108; 734-971-3600
CAR and DRIVER Radio *Producer and Host* **Alan Taylor**



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1633 Broadway
New York, New York 10019
212-767-6095
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ABC

EXOTO PRESENTS: PHIL HILL'S



Ferrari

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"SHARKNOSE"



Winner, Grand Prix of Italy at Monza.



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Monza, 1961: Phil Hill became the first American to win the F1 World Championship. His car: the Tipo 156 "Sharknose" Ferrari. But the car shown here isn't the original; rather, it's a 1:18-scale model that is, without doubt, *the most beautifully authentic re-creation of Phil's championship-winning car we've ever seen.* Just check out the V-6 engine...its six butterfly valves open and close with a gentle push on the accelerator. And with body panels removed, the exquisite detailing comes into clearer view—revealing a car so painstakingly crafted that it reminds us of a fine watch. This Exoto model is by no means inexpensive, but what items of such rare quality ever are?

Details, details:

Parts such as the exposed clutch, inboard rear disc brakes, wiring and radiator plumbing lend Exoto's 156 a realism you won't find in any other Ferrari model!

1:18 SCALE



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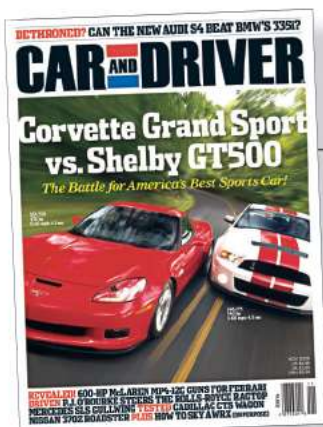
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backfires

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SARCASM SEIZURES

Ho-hum, another supercar comparo ["Street Cars Named Desire," November 2009]. Now, an article on all the classic cars behind them in the lead photo taken in Ypsilanti, Michigan, *that* would have been interesting!

MIKE PEDERSEN
NORTH BERWICK, MAINE

Wow! A Corvette beat a Mustang in "The Battle for America's Best Sports Car!" How many times has that happened? Umpteen? Isn't that in the news category of "Dog Bites Man"? Next month, why don't you test the same two cars in "The Battle for America's Best Pony Car!" Just a wild guess, but I bet the Mustang wins that one.

LEE WILLIAMS
GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

➡ *That's sarcasm, isn't it? "Dog Bites Man"—that was the tip-off, right? But not as subtle as this next guy—Ed.*

BMW GREASED!

Sweet merciful crap!!! The Audi S4 beat your beloved BMW 335i in a comparison test [November 2009]? How is this possible? Were you guys high on something? I think I see Jesus

outside my window giving me the finger.

WILLIAM PETERSON
GARLAND, TEXAS

My brain still reeling, I accept four above three, but only in math.

BOB SHAW
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

Your comparison spilled some ink to explain why the two cars are comparable in cost despite the inflated as-tested price of the Audi S4. Unfortunately, it appears that Audi has pulled a fast one because the Drive Select system isn't available on the base S4. One can get the sport differential on the base S4, but to get the full electronic suspension package, a buyer must step up to the Prestige trim level. The least-expensive S4 with Drive Select is nearly \$57K. That price overlaps with the M3's.

CARL FRIDDLE
HOUSTON, TEXAS

➡ *The base S4 is indeed available with the Drive Select package, including the trick diff, all for \$50,675. Audi expects to sell most S4s for about \$50,000, right where a fairly loaded 335i lands and \$6975 less than the base M3 sedan, which has a V-8 (and 81 more horses than the Audi). We could have compared our loaded test car against a base M3, but we thought it wiser to match it with the very comparably priced and spec'd—mechanically speaking—335i—Ed.*

I take issue with your assertion that the "additional weight, extra body roll, and inferior weight balance of a four-wheel-drive 335i hinder the overall performance." Check out www.fastestlaps.com, where you will find that, of 480 vehicles tested by *Auto Zeitung* (a German enthusiast publication) on its test track, the '08 335xi AWD sedan ranks 50th (lap time of 1:43.1). The 335i rear-drive coupe ranks 89th (1:45.8). I understand that conditions could have been different, but 2.7 seconds is an eternity, especially on a short track such as this.

DEREK KAZNOSKI
MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA

DULLWING

It took me most of the Mercedes SLS article ["Flight of the Gullwing," November 2009] to realize why I was so underwhelmed by what should be a fantastic gullwing recreation: the color. Why would the Mercedes marketing folk subject their prized possession to Cash-for-Clunker Grand Caravan red instead of draping it in a more Germanic (and historic) shade of Mercedes silver? In that red, the car simply doesn't compute.

JOE VETO
LAKE VILLA, ILLINOIS

The Mercedes SLS looks like someone put a Miata hardtop on it and the car was then rear-ended. Compared with a Dodge Viper, the SLS is 150 pounds heavier; is down 40 horsepower and 80 pound-feet of torque; gets worse gas mileage; has much smaller tires; has a lower top speed; and is slower from 0 to 60, in the quarter-mile, and around the Nürburgring. It also costs two and a half times as much. Please explain why I'm supposed to want one.

DAVID DICKS
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Is it just me, or do I remember seeing Vipers being used as the test-bed cars leading up to this ugly duckling? The 2011 SLS AMG started development life as a super-Viper while Mercedes still owned Chrysler. The proportions, the aerodynamics, the cooling passages, and the drivetrain format are all based almost entirely on the Viper's—just supercar-ized. The least Mercedes could do is give the Viper development team a shout out for getting them started!

SCOTT SNIDER
BEL AIR, MARYLAND

OK, is silver any better?
—Ed.



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Vyvanse is indicated for the treatment of ADHD. Efficacy based on two controlled trials in children aged 6 to 12 and one controlled trial in adults.

Tell the doctor about any heart conditions, including structural abnormalities, that you, your child, or a family member, may have. Inform the doctor **immediately** if you or your child develops symptoms that suggest heart problems, such as chest pain or fainting.

Vyvanse should not be taken if you or your child has advanced disease of the blood vessels (arteriosclerosis); symptomatic heart disease; moderate to severe high blood pressure; overactive thyroid gland (hyperthyroidism); known allergy or unusual reactions to drugs called sympathomimetic amines (for example, pseudoephedrine); seizures; glaucoma; a history of problems with alcohol or drugs; agitated states; taken a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) within the last 14 days.

Tell the doctor **before** taking Vyvanse if you or your child is being treated for or has symptoms of depression (sadness, worthlessness, or hopelessness) or bipolar disorder; has abnormal thought or visions, hears abnormal sounds, or has been diagnosed with psychosis; has had seizures or abnormal EEGs; has or has had high blood pressure; exhibits aggressive behavior or hostility. Tell the doctor **immediately** if you or your child develops any of these conditions or symptoms while taking Vyvanse.

Abuse of amphetamines may lead to dependence. Misuse of amphetamine may cause sudden death and serious cardiovascular adverse events. These events have also been reported rarely with amphetamine use.

Talk to your healthcare provider if your child experiences slowing of growth (height and weight). Children should have their height and weight checked periodically while taking Vyvanse. Your healthcare provider may stop Vyvanse treatment if a problem is found during these check-ups.

Vyvanse was generally well tolerated in clinical studies. The most common side effects reported in studies of Vyvanse were: *children* – decreased appetite, difficulty falling asleep, stomachache, and irritability; *adult* – decreased appetite, difficulty falling asleep, and dry mouth.

Aggression, new abnormal thoughts/behaviors, mania, growth suppression, worsening of motion or verbal tics, and Tourette's syndrome have been associated with use of drugs of this type. Tell the doctor if you or your child has blurred vision while taking Vyvanse.

Please see Patient Brief Summary of Full Prescribing Information on the following page.

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You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

MEDICATION GUIDE

VYVANSE®(lisdexamfetamine dimesylate) CII

Read the Medication Guide that comes with Vyvanse before you or your child starts taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This Medication Guide does not take the place of talking to your doctor about you or your child's treatment with Vyvanse.

What is the most important information I should know about Vyvanse?

Vyvanse is a stimulant medicine. The following have been reported with use of stimulant medicines.

1. Heart-related problems:

- sudden death in patients who have heart problems or heart defects
- stroke and heart attack in adults
- increased blood pressure and heart rate

Tell your doctor if you or your child have any heart problems, heart defects, high blood pressure, or a family history of these problems.

Your doctor should check you or your child carefully for heart problems before starting Vyvanse.

Your doctor should check you or your child's blood pressure and heart rate regularly during treatment with Vyvanse.

Call your doctor right away if you or your child has any signs of heart problems such as chest pain, shortness of breath, or fainting while taking Vyvanse.

2. Mental (Psychiatric) problems:

All Patients

- new or worse behavior and thought problems
- new or worse bipolar illness
- new or worse aggressive behavior or hostility

Children and Teenagers

- new psychotic symptoms (such as hearing voices, believing things that are not true, are suspicious) or new manic symptoms

Tell your doctor about any mental problems you or your child have, or about a family history of suicide, bipolar illness, or depression.

Call your doctor right away if you or your child have any new or worsening mental symptoms or problems while taking Vyvanse, especially seeing or hearing things that are not real, believing things that are not real, or are suspicious.

What Is Vyvanse?

Vyvanse is a central nervous system stimulant prescription medicine. It is used for the treatment of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Vyvanse may help increase attention and decrease impulsiveness and hyperactivity in patients with ADHD.

Vyvanse should be used as a part of a total treatment program for ADHD that may include counseling or other therapies.

Vyvanse is a federally controlled substance (CII) because it can be abused or lead to dependence. Keep Vyvanse in a safe place to prevent misuse and abuse. Selling or giving away Vyvanse may harm others, and is against the law.

Tell your doctor if you or your child have (or have a family history of) ever abused or been dependent on alcohol, prescription medicines or street drugs.

Who should not take Vyvanse?

Vyvanse should not be taken if you or your child:

- have heart disease or hardening of the arteries
- have moderate to severe high blood pressure
- have hyperthyroidism
- have an eye problem called glaucoma
- is sensitive to, allergic to, or had a reaction to other stimulant medicines
- are very anxious, tense, or agitated
- have a history of drug abuse
- are taking or have taken within the past 14 days an anti-depression medicine called a monoamine oxidase inhibitor or MAOI
- are taking or have taken within the past 14 days an anti-depression medicine called a monoamine oxidase inhibitor or MAOI

Vyvanse has not been studied in children less than 6 years old. Vyvanse is not recommended for use in children less than 3 years old.

Vyvanse may not be right for you or your child. Before starting Vyvanse tell your or your child's doctor about all health conditions (or a family history of) including:

- heart problems, heart defects, high blood pressure
- mental problems including psychosis, mania, bipolar illness, or depression
- tics or Tourette's syndrome
- liver or kidney problems
- thyroid problems
- seizures or have had an abnormal brain wave test (EEG)

Tell your doctor if you or your child is pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.

Can Vyvanse be taken with other medicines?

Tell your doctor about all of the medicines that you or your child take including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Vyvanse and some medicines may interact with each other and cause serious side effects. Sometimes the doses of other medicines will need to be adjusted while taking Vyvanse.

Your doctor will decide whether Vyvanse can be taken with other medicines.

Especially tell your doctor if you or your child takes:

- anti-depression medicines including MAOIs
- anti-psychotic medicines
- lithium
- blood pressure medicines
- seizure medicines
- narcotic pain medicines

Know the medicines that you or your child takes. Keep a list of your medicines with you to show your doctor and pharmacist.

Do not start any new medicine while taking Vyvanse without talking to your doctor first.

How should Vyvanse be taken?

- **Take Vyvanse exactly as prescribed.** Vyvanse comes in 6 different strength capsules. Your doctor may adjust the dose until it is right for you or your child.
- Take Vyvanse once a day in the morning.
- Vyvanse can be taken with or without food.
- From time to time, your doctor may stop Vyvanse treatment for a while to check ADHD symptoms.
- Your doctor may do regular checks of the blood, heart, and blood pressure while taking Vyvanse. Children should have their height and weight checked often while taking Vyvanse. Vyvanse treatment may be stopped if a problem is found during these check-ups.
- **If you or your child takes too much Vyvanse or overdoses, call your doctor or poison control center right away, or get emergency treatment.**

What are possible side effects of Vyvanse?

See "What is the most important information I should know about Vyvanse?" for information on reported heart and mental problems.

Other serious side effects include:

- slowing of growth (height and weight) in children
- seizures, mainly in patients with a history of seizures
- eyesight changes or blurred vision

Common side effects include:

- upper belly pain
- dizziness
- irritability
- nausea
- weight loss
- decreased appetite
- dry mouth
- trouble sleeping
- vomiting

Vyvanse may affect your or your child's ability to drive or do other dangerous activities. Talk to your doctor if you or your child has side effects that are bothersome or do not go away.

This is not a complete list of possible side effects. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

How should I store Vyvanse?

- Store Vyvanse in a safe place at room temperature, 59 to 86° F (15 to 30° C). Protect from light.
- **Keep Vyvanse and all medicines out of the reach of children.**

General information about Vyvanse

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Medication Guide. Do not use Vyvanse for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give Vyvanse to other people, even if they have the same condition. It may harm them and it is against the law.

This Medication Guide summarizes the most important information about Vyvanse. If you would like more information, talk with your doctor. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about Vyvanse that was written for healthcare professionals. For more information about Vyvanse, please contact Shire US Inc. at 1-800-828-2088.

What are the ingredients in Vyvanse?

Active Ingredient: lisdexamfetamine dimesylate

Inactive Ingredients: microcrystalline cellulose, croscarmellose sodium, and magnesium stearate. The capsule shells contain gelatin, titanium dioxide, and one or more of the following: D&C Red #28, D&C Yellow #10, FD&C Blue #1, FD&C Green #3, and FD&C Red #40.

This Medication Guide has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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VYV-01080

Shire

DROP DEAD

P.J. O'Rourke missed the point regarding the purpose of cars like the Rolls-Royce drophead coupe ["Wildlife Management," November 2009]. It's all about excess, not utility... He could also try to throw in a couple more geezer references like *Topper* and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar [sic]. That will really attract a younger audience. Also, the gay-pride parade called, and they want their shirt back (see page 57).

KEN ROESCHEL
BARTLETT, ILLINOIS

Whenever you get around to publishing an article about the Rolls drophead, I would love to read it. I just finished the article you ran about rich people and politics, with all those Phantom pictures surrounding it. Immersed in all that off-topic subject matter, I did find sentences about the hubcaps, the door-opening button, the hood, and the teak deck. Sounds cool. Too bad I know nothing else about the engineering or the styling effort it takes to create such a beautifully unobtainable car. I'm a gearhead because, when people talk about political interests and wealth, I drift off and think about how brilliant an engine design would have to be to have the longevity of the V-12 that was born in the Miura and will die after 30 years of redesign and modification.

Please stay on topic.

ALBERT CHAMBERLAIN, M.D.
GALVESTON, TEXAS

The fact that I had trouble understanding the purpose of the Rolls-Royce exposé was proof enough that I am not rich enough to buy one. I learned nothing that a good stare at the pictures couldn't tell me. And unlike in the movie *Cars*, the drophead coupe cannot speak for itself. That's what writers are for! My IQ dropped five points as a result of reading O'Rourke's article. In any case, thank you for intelligence my lowering [sic]. Damn it! That didn't take long.

PAUL E. LORENCE
PISCATAWAY, NEW JERSEY

Due to C/D's general irrelevance of information about vehicles I don't care about or can't afford, I'm dropping my subscription. But how refreshing it was to read, in my final issue, a classy car report by a humorous and literate adult rather than the self-satisfied, snide adolescents who too often have voice in the magazine.

O'Rourke's insightful and funny observations on the drophead coupe were far and away your best offering, ever. It made me recall all the other 450- or 500-hp

mythological beasts that I've never seen, never will see, and do not miss seeing. O'Rourke's hilarious take, though, however well done, was symbolic of the white elephant in the room. Were we all breathlessly awaiting more fantasy fulfillment by lapping up the pictures and the plain silly marketing of the Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Grand Sport, another completely unnecessary and improbable vehicle?

CHARLIE BAUMHAUER
WEAVERVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

➡ *Well, you're not going to be sleeping with Gisele Bündchen, either, but don't you want to at least get a good look at her?—Ed.*

Deplorable article. The overuse of allegories is nauseating. Looks also like O'Rourke asked the wrong people regarding who would purchase the Rolls: "One will be sold to Puff Daddy, and the rest will go to the Persian Gulf." Funny how all the dropheads I've seen around the affluent areas of L.A. (arguably one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the country) had a white person at the wheel. Your comment: "We'll have to find our dogs a new home at a Pan-Asian restaurant..." is highly offensive. I find it interesting that [O'Rourke] assumes anyone who can afford this car is directly or indirectly involved with the deteriorating condition of the United States.

SAMUEL OH
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

PULITZER DEPT.

Aaron Robinson ["Moby Quick," November 2009] just graduated to master class with his article on the Bugatti Grand Sport. This is why I read C/D.

DYLAN BROOKS
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

➡ *Somebody insert a masturbation joke here, then toss this note—Ed.*

AMERICAN NIGHTMARES

American Motors ["An American Tale," November 2009] had a demographics problem. "Bunkie" Knudsen's famous quote applies: "You can sell a young man's car to an old man, but you cannot sell an old man's car to a young man." AM bought large newspaper ads showing a teenage boy driving an Ambassador sedan. He was smiling (on the outside, but crying on the inside, I'm sure).

DAVE KLOMAN
PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

Enjoyed the article. AMC had unique designs. I just read an MSN-page poll of the 10 ugliest cars; AMC had three. One was a '74 Matador,

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VV-00668 10/09

which *C/D* called the best-styled auto in 1974. How funny is that?

TOM DELENA
NORTH READING,
MASSACHUSETTS

➡ *Surely we said it was the best-styled car of 1974—Ed.*

It's great to see enthusiasts devoted to more than just Ford and Chevy. Ronald and Donna Helderman from Indiana, with their '63 Rambler American 330 wagon, have figured out what life is all about. And it's not about what fancy and expensive car you drive but about driving what you love and what keeps the memories alive. I hope my wife and I can be as cool as them when we grow up!

CHAD WELLS
TOTOWA, NEW JERSEY

THE GM BOARD

The average age of GM's current board of directors ["GM's Supreme Court," Upfront, November 2009] is 61 if my long division is correct. Is that the age when people are the most innovative, creative, and energetic? But I suspect that number is close to the average age of GM customers, so it's a good fit. How can I make this letter funnier? I'm almost 61, sense of humor going fast. Memory going, too, was going to ask you something else... *I remember!* Why did you stop giving out junk to the best letter of the month?

PAUL ZURKUHNEN
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

➡ *I forget—Ed.*

Now that you've given us the abridged CV of GM's board members, here's what We the People want to know:

For whom did they vote?

How much and to whom did they contribute politically?

What did they drive before being placed on GM's board?

What GM car (or truck) did each choose as a board appointee?

What are their respective reaction times in the quarter-mile?

As for Philip Laskawy also serving on the board of Fannie Mae: Are they kidding?

TOM FERRARA
POUND RIDGE, NEW YORK

DEALER OVERKILL?

The question of shrinking the auto-deal community [Eddie Alterman, "After the Fallout," November 2009] has much more to do with ensuring that dealers are profitable and not "eating each other's babies." Sure, the manufacturer can save some costs by having fewer dealers, but a profitable dealer is one who can and will invest in his future, which includes the store property, car inventory, parts inventory, training, customer satisfaction, etc. Marginal dealers are scrimping on all those items, and it shows. Do we really need a Chevy or a Ford dealer every 8 to 10 miles along the major highways of a metro area of two million souls?

JAMES YOUNG JR.
VIA THE INTERNET

LONG-TERM TIRES

In many long-term tests, you replace tires and sometimes brakes at only 20,000 to 25,000 miles. Certainly this is not normal or average. You pay an average of \$400 per tire, or more. New cars come with top-of-the-line tires that should have at least 50,000 miles of tread wear, so why doesn't the tire warranty come into play?

PAUL COURSON
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

➡ *Replacing brakes in less than 40K miles is indeed rare, and we've only had to do so on three of 22 long-term cars over the past three years (and just one of the three, the Dodge Caravan, was a mainstream vehicle). As for tires, new cars don't come with a tread-life warranty—that's only for replacement rubber. But even in the aftermarket, nothing in the grippy and fast-wearing, high-performance categories qualifies for such a warranty. And \$300 to \$400 is simply what a 19- or 20-inch tire costs for today's sporting machines—Ed.*

CHUTES AND LEAVES

My November issue showed up today. I dove in immediately. On page 42, I learned the Corvette Grand Sport has "mongoose reflexes." On page 83, you told me the Jaguar XF has "mongoose reflexes."

Do you have a PayPal account where I can send a contribution to your "Renew the *Roget's* Subscription" fund?

RON NATH

VIA THE INTERNET

➡ *Yes, send it in care of Ol' Lightnin' Swan—Ed.*

Regarding Mark Gillies's preview of the 2012 Fiat 500 Abarth [November 2009]. Exactly what is a "nice, fruity exhaust note"? I do not believe I have ever come across this description in an automotive review.

BOB MEAD

AMHERST, NEW YORK

➡ *Well, it was either that or, "You can drive the snot out of it with little fear of getting bit in the ass." Plus, we'd used up all the masturbation jokes—Ed.* 🇺🇸

AGASSI MACHINE

The front end of the Spyker C8 Aileron [November 2009] says Jaguar and Aston Martin, the tail end says Alfa and GT40, and the manufacturer name says Pokémon. However, either Scotty installed a handful of photon torpedo tubes and a pair of phasers, or this is the jet air car that *Popular Science* swears we'll all be driving any decade now. Functional they may be, but do they launch ground-to-ground missiles, or are they the retro-rockets for reentry? Spyker, please advise your stylists that NACA ducts look slightly less dorky and work better. While a Murciélago looks like it enjoys eating small mammals, your car

looks like a multibarrel tennis-ball machine.

RICK LOTTER
RICHFIELD, WISCONSIN



TENNIS-BALL MACHINE/GETTY IMAGES SPYKER BY MARC URBANO



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While designing the all-new Kizashi, we targeted sedans such as the Audi A4® and Acura TSX®. We started by creating a track-tuned, highly rigid chassis with available all-wheel-drive traction. Next, we gave the Kizashi advanced safety features that meet 2014 standards. Then we added technology like standard SmartPass™ push-button ignition and an available 425-watt Rockford Fosgate® audio system. We finished with the most powerful standard engine in its class. The result? *AutoWeek* said the Kizashi was the "best handling and most composed FWD sedan we've driven." The name is unusual, and the car is one you won't soon forget.

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JOHN phillips

Twenty new rules to boost NASCAR's ratings.

Another NASCAR season has concluded, yet I still don't grasp the "Race for the Chase." You get most of the way through the season, then the dozen best drivers lose all their points and start over again, while the rest of the field—the losers, who already feel like crap—are excluded from championship contention and are showcased nationally as losers, tried twice for the same crime.

I do understand why sanctioning bodies—now including the NHRA, with its awkwardly named "Countdown to One"—might be drawn to such contrivances. It effectively bestows two championship titles per season. But if spectators are really such obliging nitwits, how about this: The driver who wins any race is immediately crowned the champion. Maybe even the world champion. And he remains the world champion until someone else wins—probably at the next event—and then the series gets to crown yet another world champion. This system theoretically gives NASCAR 36 champions per year and the NHRA, 24. Here are 20 other new rules to boost NASCAR's ratings:

1. Fans may throw anything on the track at any time, as long as it is: a) an item made of glass, b) a car battery, or c) a riding mower.
2. One grandstand at every track must be reserved exclusively for: a) alcoholics (blood-alcohol levels will be tested), b) persons wearing electronic ankle tethers, and c) rodeo clowns with snakes.
3. All cars must be capable of 300 mph. To achieve this, no scrutineer will ever glance under the hood of a competitor's car. (Note: Solid rocket fuel, while discouraged, will not be expressly banned as long as it is "The Official Solid Rocket Fuel of NASCAR.")
4. The speed limit on pit lane will be 175 mph—strictly enforced, no exceptions.
5. Three (3) celebrity drivers and/or politician drivers will compete in every race. At least one (1) must be severely maimed or paralyzed in a crash so violent that it shuts down the track for thirty (30) minutes, a period hence-

forth to be known as "Free-Beer Time."

6. A lottery will be undertaken in which three (3) RV and/or bus owners in the infield will be permitted to compete in the actual race for any ten (10) laps of their choosing.

7. During "Free-Beer Time," fans will electronically vote to sacrifice between six (6) and nine (9) spectator vehicles to a peat bog maintained at every track, starting with the automobile the promoter drove to that day's race.

8. During the event, the spectator who starts the largest fire will be invited to participate in the victory celebration.

9. At one race each year, the National Rifle

is televised live on the infield JumboTron.

14. The TV broadcasting team will, at every race, include two (2) of the following persons as color commentators: John Madden, O.J. Simpson, Ellen DeGeneres, Michael Jackson's physician, Sly and the Family Stone, Sharon Stone, Oliver Stone, Stone Phillips, or the Rolling Stones.

15. One (1) car per event must explode.

16. Twenty (20) minutes of each TV broadcast will be allotted to a segment videotaped in the grandstands. This segment will officially be known as "Is She Wearing a Bra?"

17. Any competitor with the surname

During 'Free-Beer Time,' drivers will demonstrate their helmet-throwing abilities.

Association will hold its annual convention and, during green-flag racing, will oversee a competition that determines the organization's "Marksman of the Year."

10. During "Free-Beer Time," drivers will demonstrate their helmet-throwing abilities. Any driver who inflicts a closed head injury will be crowned that day's "Helmet-Hurling Hero" and will restart the race in first place.

11. Every pit crew must employ one (1) actual simian, with DNA to be tested by the San Diego Zoo. This simian may have any name as long as it's "Walker, Texas Ranger" and must perform a vital pit function—changing tires, adding fuel, or challenging the driver to a game of rock/paper/scissors.

12. At any time, members of the France family can demand the installation of snow chains on the driven wheels of five (5) competing vehicles.

13. On lap 100, one (1) driver will be selected at random to undergo a personal IRS audit that

"Busch" will be ejected from the premises of all tracks, including those tracks that have never hosted a NASCAR event.

18. At the night event at Bristol Motor Speedway, the back straightaway will include a ramp-to-ramp leap of no less than sixty (60) feet. Competitors who misjudge their entry speeds and land amidst throngs of spectators will be subject to a drive-through penalty but will not lose a lap.

19. Any driver whose car is disabled can reenter the race but only in a rental car acquired through "The Official Rental-Car Agency of NASCAR."

20. On an undisclosed lap of every race, NASCAR will prominently display a handsome skull-and-crossbones flag, informing drivers that the event, effective immediately, will proceed in a clockwise direction.

NASCAR reserves the right to change any of these rules at any time it pleases. (This is not a new rule.) ■

An uncompromising solution conceived out of thin air.



Design isn't merely about how beautiful something looks. It's how beautifully it performs. Especially when it comes to managing the wind. And nowhere is this belief more evident than in the expert craftsmanship of Mr. Keiichi Taniguchi, engineer behind the side air vents on the Infiniti FX.

In a collaborative effort, both Mr. Taniguchi's engineering group and the vehicle's design team quickly agreed that, unlike other crossovers, the side air vents on the FX would serve a greater purpose than mere decoration. It was critical they contribute to the dynamic performance of the FX, while also enhancing the assertive styling of the iconic vehicle. The teams' combined goal would be a side air vent designed to stir desire like no other.

"Creating effective aerodynamics

is easy. Doing so with good looks means designing a car I want to own myself," stated Mr. Taniguchi.

His passion to fuse form and function led him to Infiniti's own full-scale wind tunnel capable of generating winds of up to 168 mph.

Eventually, an exacting design was developed that significantly relieves air pressure under the hood, reducing front-end lift by 5%. The reduced lift helps increase tire grip for exceptional stability and handling even at highway speeds. Even the vents' distinguishing fins have a specific function, preventing reverse airflow back into the engine bay. And being purposely flush to the body panels, they add to the FX's drag coefficient of 0.35.

The net effect is a sports-car-like drive with the visual stopping power found in no other crossover, providing drivers a more dynamic driving experience. And in the opinion of Mr. Taniguchi, that's a very beautiful thing indeed.

For detailed specifications and more, visit InfinitiUSA.com.

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DAVID E. davis jr.

Mega fun in Mini packages.

I am six feet two, and my suit size is 48 Long. Among the joys of my life are small cars. Somewhere in the back issues of this magazine I can be found singing the praises of little cars, suggesting that “low mass is its own reward.”

Sometimes men, shorter and in better shape than I, approach me to say, “I can’t get into these little cars. I don’t know what it is. I just don’t fit in them.” Well, Georg Kacher, the ubiquitous European automotive correspondent, is bigger than I am, drives like a star of the old Joie Chitwood Thrill Show, and loves the Fiat X1/9, finding it roomy and comfortable.

That whining complaint about the lack of interior space in the most popular small cars is somehow related to concerns about one’s own size and shape and the impression we make on entering a crowded room or driving up to the entrance of the country club. These guys are uncomfortable with the notion that they may not appear big or important enough! God help them. A Greek god could arrive on a Whizzer bike and immediately captivate everyone at the company picnic. A Caspar Milquetoast could arrive in a customized Hummer and have the same crowd wetting themselves in spasms of laughter. It ain’t whatcha drive, guys, it’s whatcha bring to the driving experience.

We are currently blessed with a wonderful assortment of little cars, any or all of them designed to cause sleepless nights among the members of OPEC. Any small car is fun to drive. They’re easier to park, easier to maneuver, easier in fact to perform the phenomenal avoidances that are such an important part of modern traffic. They also deliver fabulous fuel-economy numbers.

The Morris and Austin Minis, grandparents of the BMW-built Minis that are all over the American road net today, demonstrated that a tiny little car with some serious attention to its roadholding and maneuverability can

make you giggle until the ice cream comes out of your nose. Road races limited exclusively to BMW 700s or Mini Coopers in the Fifties and Sixties were often more exciting than the feature races they supported. 🍌

Today’s Mini has taught an entire generation that fun can still play a role in a world where fun is rapidly going out of fashion. Even its innovative marketing campaign has tweaked the funny bones while supplying product-information nourishment to starving young brains—and may a tickled God rain down His blessings on BMW for that!

Alec Issigonis, who designed the original Mini, was a classic British eccentric, and he

bottle of champagne to an occupant of the other. For my expatriate friend, those two speeding cars captured perfectly the London of the Beatles and Carnaby Street and the Mods. Great Britain might sink, giggling, into the sea, but, by God, it was going to be fun to watch!

When the American importer of Minis raised the question of an optional automatic transmission as a means of expanding the U.S. Mini market, it was learned that the old killjoy American safety authorities would demand that the car’s automatic transmission be fitted with a park position. Issigonis fought this stipulation, arguing that the little car had a perfectly good hand brake. The meeting ended in



It ain’t whatcha drive, guys, it’s whatcha bring to the driving experience.

never expected his tiny little economy car to become a cult vehicle that would spend most of its life getting its wheels driven off. He thought he had created all that extra capability to make it safer, but its owners took childish delight in driving it right through the wizard Issigonis’s safety margins, whether they were driving around a racing circuit or taking the children to the public library.

An American friend, who had just moved from Southern California to London in the Sixties, came out of a restaurant late on New Year’s Eve and was startled by the roar of two Minis racing flat-out down a narrow street, side by side. As he watched, a lovely female arm came out of the window of one car and transferred a

impasse. In the next meeting, the wily Issigonis unveiled his solution to the American parking-pawl problem by opening his briefcase with a flourish and producing a set of wheel chocks!

The American contingent was not amused.

Years ago, my wife and I had dinner with the then-chairman of BLMC, one of the later reorganizations of British Leyland—an early version of President Obama’s current collective solution to all of our nation’s automotive dilemmas. As a former owner of two Minis, my wife wanted to know if there would ever be another Mini. That worthy gentleman snorted into his Château Lafite Rothschild ’57 and said, “No American will ever again buy a car that is barely more than 10 feet long.” 🇺🇸

CAMEL SNUS

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PAGE 26 > One Man's Junk

A few of the oddballs and desirable cars that died as a result of "Cash for Clunkers."

PAGE 27 > Bambola di Carta

Here's your chance to help Fiat and Chrysler's main man get dressed for success.

PAGE 28 > eBay 101

A few pointers on how to sell a car without looking like a complete moron.

A California freeway goes quiet. Page 30.



➔ **FEB/10**

upfront

China Gets Rolling

> A LOOK AT THE BIG PLAYERS IN WHAT WILL BE THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAR MARKET.



by **JENS MEINERS**

The U.S.'s leadership of the world car market has finally come to an end. China is now where the action is, like it or not.

Just one generation ago, when hard-line Maoist communism was the reality, individual mobility in China meant grabbing a bike and pedaling. Now the roads are crammed with cars, even though less than three percent of the 1.3 billion Chinese own their own vehicles.

The Chinese market is growing at an astonishing pace. From producing 30,000 passenger cars 20 years ago, production has risen to an estimated 8.3 million passenger cars in 2009;

total sales (including trucks, cars, and commercial vehicles) were expected to reach 12.6 million, which would make China the world's largest automotive market. And this ferocious growth is not over: Shanghai-based analyst Jochen Siebert expects passenger-car production to grow to 9.5 million by 2012, with sales reaching 14 million units.

From 2001 to 2005, China built 15,350 miles of expressway, which now totals 25,480 miles. The U.S. has more than 46,000 miles of interstate, but by 2020, China may top that.

Foreign carmakers looking for a piece of the Chinese pie must tread very carefully. The government requires those companies to team up with a Chinese partner. The first Western carmaker to gain a substantial foothold was Volkswagen in the 1980s, partnering with Shanghai

Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC). The VW Santana, which we knew as the Quantum 25 years ago, is still sold in the People's Republic. GM's Buick brand, a popular car with the Chinese elite before Mao's emergence, sells more cars in China than in its homeland.

These alliances carry enormous cultural and corporate baggage. Despite having a partnership with VW, SAIC-VW and FAW-VW don't seem to trust each other enough to put together a common purchasing policy; VW has a common purchasing policy for all of its other brands throughout the world.

Another issue is that intellectual property rights in China are not always respected, resulting in copycat products.

Here's a look at the current players in China, and what they bring to the game.

BYD: A battery maker in Shenzhen called BYD—its marketing office says it stands for “Build Your Dreams”—has thrown itself into carmaking in a big way. “Boundless Optimism” might be a more appropriate company name: BYD says its goal is to become the world’s biggest carmaker by 2025.

Even with some rather pedestrian offerings, including clones of GM Daewoo and Toyota vehicles, sales grew massively, from 20,000 units in 2005 to more than 300,000 in 2009. The most curious offering is called the “S8,” a retractable-hardtop convertible that blends the look of the Mercedes-Benz CLK with that of the Renault Mégane. The company is now concentrating on making hybrids and fully electric vehicles and claims its upcoming electric e6 minivan will have a range of 250 miles. To achieve that range, the e6 carries a battery pack that weighs 1200 pounds.

CHERY: If there’s a Chinese carmaker that’s been underestimated, it’s Chery. Many China-car watchers know the “QQ,” a blatant copy of the diminutive Daewoo Matiz, as well as the company’s Eastar, which looks suspiciously like the GM Daewoo Leganza/Suzuki Verona. This so irritated the usually placid GM that it sued. In its defense, Chery claimed to have a contract with Daewoo to build the two cars but still has not produced a document to support that claim. The Chinese courts didn’t appear to care, and Daewoo owner GM lost. Chery is also the brand that Malcolm Bricklin tried to bring to the States, and when that didn’t work out, he sued for \$14 billion. Today, the company is working to transform its lineup and expand its brands by launching a premium brand dubbed Xuan Yuan. The first Xuan Yuan model is slated to be a luxury sedan with a Chery-developed 3.0-liter V-6 and 4.2-liter V-8. A cooperative agreement with Fiat, however, got off on the wrong foot: Fiat wanted to build the Alfa Romeo 159 in China, but Chery said no thanks, citing the Alfa’s inferior technology.

FAW: First Automotive Works (now known as the FAW Group) is one of the oldest Chinese automakers and has been a cooperation partner with Mazda, Toyota, and VW, but it also has brands of its own (Besturn, Haima, Hongqi, and Xiali). Hongqi (Red Flag) has built its baroque “three flags” limousine since the 1950s. FAW’s in-house brands launched nine new models in 2009, but on closer inspection,

➔ Other Notables in China

This gang of five is hardly the whole story. Another Chinese brand with a future is **BRILLIANCE**, though it’s been a rocky road. Brilliance makes the BS6 sedan, the car that did so poorly on a European crash test that Brilliance’s European importer ended up bankrupt. Brilliance is BMW’s cooperation partner, and the two share a factory that builds long-wheelbase 5-series sedans for the Chinese market. BMW has plans to build a second plant with Brilliance in 2010.

Others? There’s **CHANG’AN**, a Ford partner that is considering building a plant in Mexico to eventually tap into the U.S. market. And **GREAT WALL MOTOR** is little more than a copy shop, but it claims to sell vehicles in more than 120 countries. **SHUANGHUAN**, a firm that sells its CEO SUV (a copy of the first-gen BMW X5) in Europe and has been working on exporting its Bubble (a Smart Fortwo copy), is being taken to court by BMW and Daimler AG in hopes of stopping its sales. The company that bought Hummer, **SICHUAN TENGZHONG**, has never built a car, but it is an established manufacturer of heavy machinery. GM will build the H2 and H3 until June 2011, with the option of another year. After that, the Chinese will be solely responsible for Hummer.



refrigerators has become the biggest privately owned carmaker in China. So far, the growth has come from its own vehicles, many of them “inspired” by Western and Japanese models. Geely plans to grow through acquisitions. First, the firm acquired a share in Manganese Bronze, makers of the classic London Taxi and—perhaps to the sniggering of its rivals—announced that a luxury car would emerge from that platform. Geely’s next move might not be as funny: It is working on taking over Volvo and has ambitious plans for the Swedish brand.

SAIC: The largest of the Chinese carmakers, SAIC has had a working relationship with both VW and GM and, as a result, has learned much about making cars. In late 2004, SAIC bought the rights to build several Rover models but not the rights to the Rover name. As a result, SAIC’s version of the Rover 75 became the amusingly named “Roewe 750.” But no one’s laughing now. The new Roewe 550 and 350 models, developed with the help of engineering firm Ricardo, are easily the most advanced indigenous vehicles in the Chinese market. What’s more, they’re not just copies of Western products any longer; they have distinctive styling and engineering aimed at worldwide markets. The 550 may be sold in Europe as a Ssangyong, a Korean brand owned by SAIC. SAIC is expected to sell 2.65 million cars in 2009, making it the eighth-largest automaker in the world.

things look less rosy. “Unlike some others, FAW does not own the technology of its cars,” says analyst Siebert. Indeed, FAW is responsible for almost zero independent engineering, and its generic styling themes have little potential to keep the brands alive. FAW had better keep its cooperation partners happy, as it seems unlikely to be able to survive on its own.

GEELY: Some Chinese automakers make it hard to be taken seriously. Geely, for example. It makes a car called the Beauty Leopard. Still, this former producer of scooters and



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UPFRONT

Clunker Numbers



The program known as "Cash for Clunkers" ran for two months last summer and accounted for government-subsidized trade-ins on nearly 700,000 new-car sales at a cost to taxpayers of \$2.9 billion. Sure, the new cars were, on average, 58 percent more fuel efficient, but we're more concerned with how many Porsches were destroyed (11) and how many original Ford Taurus SHO's had sodium silicate poured into their Yamaha-built V-6s (2). Here are the kill rates on some of the more interesting and desirable rides that were destroyed by the program and their base prices when new:



000123

1984-'95 Chevrolet
Corvette
\$23,360-\$37,825



000009

1990-'92 Mercedes-Benz
500SL
\$83,500-\$106,945



000001

1993 Mazda RX-7
\$33,135



000001

1985 TVR 280i
\$28,300



000067

1986-'89 Mercedes-Benz
560SL
\$48,200-\$64,230



000003

1989-'90 Lancia
Prisma
\$38,850-\$43,850



000001

1991 BMW M3
\$35,900



000001

1991 BMW M5
\$56,600



000001

1992 GMC Typhoon
\$28,975



000001

1997 Aston Martin
DB7 Volante
\$146,530



000001

2005 Mazda RX-8
\$25,920



000003

1997-'98 Mitsubishi
3000GT Spyder
\$57,449-\$64,449

Free
Toy



ITALIAN DRESSING

As we're reminded about every 17 seconds, Italians are the princes of fashion and the rest of us live in the style equivalent of Winnipeg. For an example of the perfect Italian stud, we have **Sergio Marchionne**, the Big Decider at Fiat and overlord of a little outfit in Maranello called Ferrari. Here we bring together the *entire* bravura wardrobe of Signor Marchionne.

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Launch Controlled

For 2010, Nissan is changing the launch-control programming on its scorchingly fast GT-R. On the '09 car, engaging the full-bore launch control required switching off the stability control (VDC). The engine would rev to 4400 rpm before a neck-snapping automated clutch drop. After a moment of wheelspin, the GT-R would hurtle to 60 mph in 3.2 seconds, the quickest time we achieved in several tests of the '09 GT-R.

The problem was that some owners of this \$77,840 screamer were assassinating their \$20,000 gearboxes, and the GT-R's warranty states that shutting off the VDC voids the warranty. Break your transmission after a few launch-control starts and you'll pay, not Nissan. The alternative, to leave the VDC on, resulted in a wimpy, 1800-rpm launch. So, for 2010, Nissan is offering a single launch-control feature that works whether or not the VDC is engaged.

The new setup is a compromise that provides owners with launch control that won't potentially void the warranty. With the new program, engine revs build to 3000 to launch the GT-R. The result is far less distressing to the transmission than the 4400-rpm launch and quicker than the 1800-rpm launch.

Everything has a price: The new model is slower by 0.5 second to 30 mph and 0.6 second to 60. Don't sweat it, though—by 150 mph, the two models are tied.



PREPARE FOR TAKEOFF

- Gear selector in drive.
- Transmission in "R" mode.
- Suspension in "R" mode.
- Stability control in "R" mode.
- Left foot on brake.
- Right foot flooring accelerator.
- Release brake.
- Hold on.

THE NUMBERS

GT-R PERFORMANCE

ZERO TO 30 MPH >

ZERO TO 60 MPH >

ZERO TO 100 MPH >

ZERO TO 150 MPH >

STANDING 1/4-MILE >

'09 Launch Control

1.2 sec

3.2 sec

8.1 sec

20.1 sec

11.6 sec @ 120 mph

'10 Launch Control

1.7 sec

3.8 sec

8.4 sec

20.1 sec

12.0 sec @ 120 mph



How to: ^{NOT} WRITE AN EBAY MOTORS POSTING

We wonder how anything gets sold on eBay Motors. The language of the ads mostly reveals the failings of our educational system. As a public service, here's an example of what not to do and, at left, how to clean up your ad. Still scratching your head? Well, watching wrestling won't make you a better writer.

1. Price it right.

Entice buyers with a realistic price. \$20K for a Biturbo?

2. Picture perfect.

Post a well-lit photo that's in focus. Use one of a real car, not your second-grader's diorama art project.

3. Face facts.

Just because no one wanted to buy it when it was new doesn't mean it's worth something now (example: Chrysler's TC by Maserati).

4. Check yourself.

Use spell check. If that doesn't work, reenroll in elementary school.

5. Dude, you're scaring me.

Giving sellers a glimpse into a bizarre personal life probably won't drive up the price. The wrong kind of information will

only attract wayward trannies, not buyers.

6. Say what?

Too many ads are riddled with head-scratching contradictions that call into question all of the information. Avoid forcing sellers into asking questions to find the truth.

7. Stop yelling.

CAPITALIZING indiscriminately makes it sound like you're YELLING.

8. Pants on fire.

Don't lie or exaggerate. The odometer stopped working last week? Highway miles? Elderly owner? No one will believe ridiculous stories.

9. Death threats.

Keep threats and problems with deadbeat bidders to yourself, or at least word them in a sane manner.

—TONY QUIROGA

The screenshot shows an eBay Motors listing for a 1987 Maserati. The listing includes a title, a picture of a car, a starting bid of US \$20,000.00, and a vehicle history report. The vehicle history report lists details such as title, mileage, location, VIN, inspection, vehicle title, condition, for sale by, features, body type, transmission, disability equipped, options, and exterior/interior colors. The listing also includes a description of the car and a warning about bidding.

Annotations on the screenshot:

- 1. Price it right: US \$20,000.00
- 2. Picture perfect: Photo of a car
- 3. Face facts: Vehicle History Report Summary for 1987 Maserati
- 4. Check yourself: Description of the car
- 5. Dude, you're scaring me: Warning about bidding
- 6. Say what?: CAPITALIZING
- 7. Stop yelling: YELLING
- 8. Pants on fire: Don't lie or exaggerate
- 9. Death threats: Keep threats and problems with deadbeat bidders to yourself

Unintentional Exotics

Occasionally, mundane cars sell in such small numbers that they become de facto "exotics." These two wagons are rarer than Bentley's \$189,095 Continental GT.*



Jaguar X-type wagon

Being slightly more attractive than the X-type sedan didn't help its sales.

YEARS SOLD > 2005-2008
UNITS SOLD IN U.S. > 1602



Lexus IS300 SportCross

Odd hatchback-like styling on a sports sedan was not a recipe for U.S. success.

YEARS SOLD > 2002-2005
UNITS SOLD IN U.S. > 3088



Bentley Continental GT

A 552-hp "intentional exotic" that easily outsells both wagons.

YEARS SOLD > 2004-present
UNITS SOLD IN U.S. > 6860

Cadillac

► THE ALL-NEW 2010 SRX



► THE CADILLAC OF CROSSOVERS

Adjectives are well and good, but for those who know, the numbers speak for themselves. Choose the 265 hp 3.0L V6 with direct injection and variable valve timing, or opt for the 2.8L V6 Turbo that produces 300 hp and 295 lb-ft of torque*, both with a six-speed automatic transmission. And whatever your engine choice, there is a sophisticated chassis underneath to make the most of the powertrain. Plus, available ZF SACHS Continuous Damping Control suspension technology reads the road every 2 milliseconds for improved driving dynamics. Finally, when the weather turns bad, one of the most advanced All-Wheel Drive systems available manages torque to each wheel, and is augmented by a rear electronic limited slip differential, which provides enhanced control. Introducing the new standard for luxury crossovers. The all-new 2010 Cadillac SRX. Starting at \$34,155.† As shown \$49,640.‡



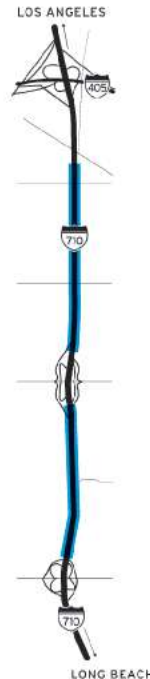
Shushing an L.A. Freeway

► ENGINEERS BAKE A LAYER CAKE OF ASPHALT ON A CONCRETE CRUST.

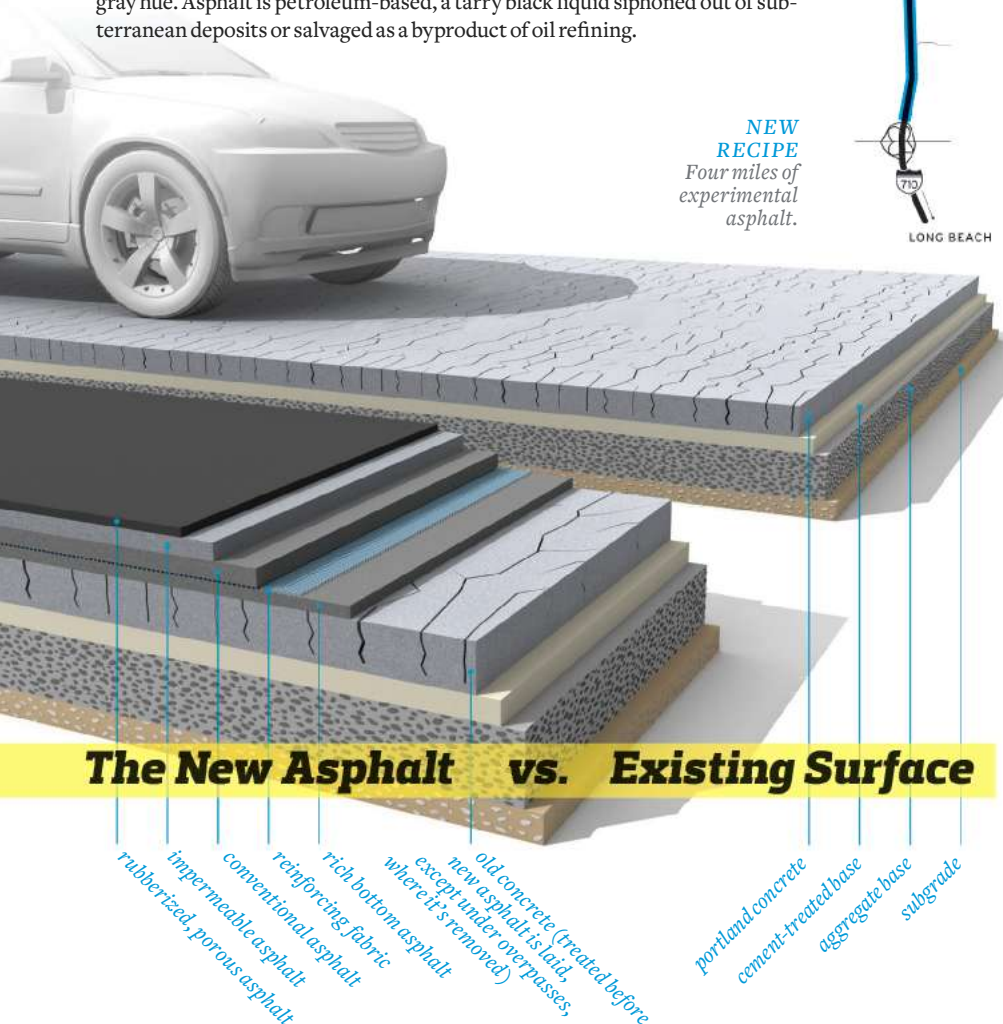
Interstate 710 is noisy and broken. The 23-mile concrete artery links the busy container port in Long Beach, California, to the foothills east of Los Angeles. In the four decades since its construction, it has been shattered by Walmart's Christmas inventory and all the other imported stuff borne by the daily stream of trucks roaring out of the port.

A reconstruction that could cost more than \$28 million per freeway mile when completed in 2015 has four miles containing a new recipe developed by researchers to smooth and hush the freeway, save money by using less material, and make it easier to maintain in the long run. The key ingredient is asphalt, baked into a multilayer slab of flexible, vibration-absorbing super-freeway that goes right over the old concrete highway. The old 710 stays behind as a foundation and to save the cost of removal.

All road pavement is a mix of crushed rock, or aggregate, and a cement that glues it all together into a hard slab. Concrete, with its common binder, portland cement, is a mix of aggregate such as limestone and various clays that give it its gray hue. Asphalt is petroleum-based, a tarry black liquid siphoned out of subterranean deposits or salvaged as a byproduct of oil refining.



NEW RECIPE
Four miles of experimental asphalt.



The New Asphalt vs. Existing Surface

Concrete lasts longer, but asphalt is generally smoother and quieter, though advances in concrete have narrowed the gap. California has always favored concrete but, lobbied by the asphalt industry to try a new formula on the 710 reconstruction for a quieter freeway, chose asphalt as an experiment to see if a high-tech blacktop superslab can be built and maintained for the right price, says John Harvey, civil-engineering professor, pavement expert, and principal investigator for the University of California at Davis's Pavement Research Center.

Asphalt is usually paved in layers, but the difference here is the mix of asphalt types and the rigid formula used to lay them. The top layer, about an inch thick and designed to be skimmed and replaced every 8 to 10 years for quick, cheap maintenance, is porous asphalt mixed with recycled tire rubber, which cuts noise. Rain splashing and aquaplaning are also reduced because the porosity allows water to drain to the second layer, a three-inch-thick mantle of asphalt infused with polymers that give it the flexibility to absorb traffic pounding. It's also waterproof, forcing runoff to the side, and serves as the freeway's air sole.

The third layer, which is either 3.3 inches or six inches of asphalt and rock, depending on clearances needed under overpasses, is the road's rigid backbone, its I-beam, to prevent bending and cracking. Underneath that is either 1.8 inches of additional asphalt for sealing the old road bed, or, under overpasses where the old road must be scraped away for truck clearances, a tightly compacted, three-inch-thick "rich bottom layer," which has a higher ratio of the asphalt "glue" to aggregate. The extra asphalt acts as a lubricant to get the aggregate to pack down tighter as it's steamrolled, removing all air pockets. It's the rigid, reinforcing frosting that seals and insulates a new aggregate base at bottom.

Engineers won't be certain for a couple of decades if this is the "it" recipe for highway reconstruction.

—AARON ROBINSON

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EDITOR'S PICK
AUGUST 2009



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forza italia!

PREVIEW

by AARON ROBINSON
photography by CHARLIE MAGEE



YOU DON'T DRIVE THE NEW FERRARI...



YOU GRAB ITS POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TERMINALS

La Pista di Fiorano,

Ferrari's private test track, is two giant hooked paper clips wedged between a porcelain tile factory that belches white smoke and a scruffy apartment block whose tenants, we learn from an exasperated Ferrari spokesman, are always bitching about the noise.

Noise? Describing a Ferrari in full scream as "noise" is probably against the law in Italy. The rifferaff wouldn't dare if the old man were still around. It's like calling the Bayeux Tapestry a beach blanket.

Nonetheless, Ferrari's jaded neighbors

have forced the mighty House of Enzo, whose much photographed red-brick factory gate is just across the street, to abide by strict sound-level limits and obtain special permits to run racing cars with open exhausts (Ferrari also owns the Mugello circuit near Florence to the southwest, where it has moved much of its testing). The fact that the Fiorano facility, built in 1972, predates most of the buildings around it doesn't inhibit the neighbors' chutzpah.

Your favorite car magazine has returned to strap on the company's newest mid-engined doorstop, the 458 Italia, with 562 horsepower straining to run down insolent peasants. At the moment, someone else is

piloting, and perhaps it's just a feeling, but Ferrari test driver Raffaele De Simone seems to relish downshifting to second for that tight left-hander in the track's southwest corner, near the apartment blocks. We emerge sideways in a ballet of bawling rubber, the tach screwed up to its window-rattling, 9000-rpm redline.

Noise? *We got your noise right here!*

After a few laps, about a third of which involve us looking down the track through the side glass, De Simone climbs out and beckons me to the driver's carbon-fiber bucket. He then strides away. I'm on my own, even though, about five years ago, I introduced a new Ferrari to a wall on a sim-



History up the wazoo: The 458's tailpipe trio evokes the F40, while the taillamps are pure Enzo. Each mesh screen adjoining the rear lights hides a separate transmission radiator.



AND LET THE JUICE STAND YOUR HAIR ON END.

ilar day not far from this very spot. Don't these people learn?

When it arrives in June, Ferrari's volume car—it'll be a failure if it delivers less than half of Ferrari's worldwide sales, which are about 6000 cars—will boot the retiring F430 F1 (price: \$205,404) off its perch with a projected 10-percent price increase, another 79 horses, slightly more cabin space, and a spec sheet wet with technology, including a seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox (alas, no manual—you knew this was coming).

The ragtop Spider should arrive within a year or so, with the requisite parade to follow of limited-edition specials, including Challenge Stradale and Scuderia.





Life is unfair; we all know it. It is an article of faith among the bourgeoisie that anyone stinking-rich enough to afford a new Ferrari can't drive worth a damn. They imprison their machines in air-conditioned lockups, parked on polished marble covered with wax paper to keep the tire treads from losing the original factory gloss. Thankfully, the negative stereotypes—hardly helped by that YouTube video of a Bugatti Veyron being towed out of a deep marsh—don't stop Ferrari from forging ahead, developing ever grander rewards for affluence.

Indeed, you don't drive the new Ferrari 458 Italia at all. You grab its positive and negative terminals and let the juice stand your hair on end. It goes *whaaaaaoooo!* when you stroke the throttle, and it *explodes* forward, an aluminum red sabot with seatbelts.

The dual-clutch box changes gears with less shock and delay than a TV changing channels. Upshifts take 0.4 second, we're told, though nobody thought to clock them. Hold the left paddle approaching a corner and the crackling downshifts come automatically and rapid-fire. The carbon-ceramic brakes—standard on all 458s—can park the car in startlingly short distances and also answer to minute changes in foot pressure.

The steering is somewhat reminiscent of a Honda's: slightly light, as though the front tires barely touch the ground. But with an 11.5:1 ratio, it's breathlessly swift. The directional control into a corner is so clear and explicit that you'll swear there's a rudder tilling the asphalt. Going quick is easy, like wearing parabolic skis or doing square roots on a calculator.

Electronic magnetorheological shock absorbers keep the car's body flat and calm, even over the heart-fluttering *yump!* on Fiorano's bridge. Traction and stability control, the electronic differential, and a sport ABS mode—all adjustable via the steering wheel's "*manettino*" (it means "little handle")—do for grip on braking and corner exits what they would do in Formula 1 were they not banned. Unless the traction and anti-spin devices are switched off or set to the low-intervention mode, the Italia churns out of corners as if Jupiter himself is sitting on the back bumper.

The Ferrari touchstones are all there: the fishbowl engine hatch, the shapely pair of thighs in red spandex underneath, and an interior swaddled in perfumed leather. The saucy yellow tach carries over, as do the

◆ FLOW MOTION

Wind tunnels—both real and computer imagined—helped Ferrari increase downforce without worsening drag.



REDUCING LIFT

The mesh "tear ducts" between the headlights direct fast-moving air through tunnels to slots in the front fender, where the flow alters the pressure balance on the fender and, in turn, reduces lift.

DIVERTING AIR

In the nose, rushing air pushes the tips of the flexible plastic winglets down by as much as 0.8 inch at speed, diverting more air below the car than through the radiators for reduced drag and lift.

A RAM EFFECT

Unpolluted body sides help the rear diffuser work, so the shoulder ducts are gone. The engine inhales through ducts next to the quarter-windows, which curve to spur a ram-air effect worth five horsepower.

EXIT A HOT BREEZE

The two transmission coolers packed into the tail emit hot air into the slipstream directly behind the 458, which pushes back drag-inducing wind vortices, away from the car where they can't affect it.



THE 4.5-LITER ENGINE SPEAKS WITH A DEEPER VOICE THAN THE OLD 4.3. IT'S LESS OF A SHRIEK THAN A MANLY BELLOW.

THE NUMBERS

VEHICLE TYPE > mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe
 ESTIMATED BASE PRICE > \$226,000
 ENGINE TYPE > DOHC 32-valve V-8, aluminum block and heads, direct fuel injection
 DISPLACEMENT > 274 cu in, 4497cc
 POWER (SAE NET) > 562 bhp @ 9000 rpm
 TORQUE (SAE NET) > 398 lb-ft @ 6000 rpm
 TRANSMISSION > 7-speed dual-clutch automated manual
 DIMENSIONS:
 WHEELBASE > 104.3 in LENGTH > 178.2 in
 WIDTH > 76.3 in HEIGHT > 47.8 in
 CURB WEIGHT > 3450 lb
 PERFORMANCE (C/D EST):
 ZERO TO 60 MPH > 3.3 sec
 ZERO TO 100 MPH > 7.4 sec
 STANDING ¼-MILE > 11.5 sec @ 128 mph
 TOP SPEED (DRAG LIMITED) > 202 mph
 PROJECTED FUEL ECONOMY (C/D EST):
 EPA CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 12/17 mpg

transmission and launch-control buttons, which look like three shotgun shells embedded in the center console.

But Ferrari's mid-engined car has been reshaped, the cockpit bubble pushed forward to mimic an F-16's canopy silhouette. The wheelbase grows by almost two inches, and the overhangs shrink. The F430's flaring nostrils are gone, replaced by a single carp's mouth split by deformable airfoils [see "Flow Motion" sidebar].

Other changes: The 4.5-liter engine speaks with a deeper voice than the old 4.3.

It's less of a shriek than a manly bellow. Compared with the hand-fabricated simplicity of prior Ferrari dashboards, the 458's is a garden of abstract sculpture. Fingers need time to acclimate to the crowded steering wheel with its buttons for turn indicators, high-beams, and wiper controls. Knobs page through a pair of digital display screens in the cluster. To the right of the tach: navigation, radio, or a digital facsimile of an analog speedometer. To the left is car status, including a hokey "Vehicle Dynamic Assistance" screen. The engine/gearbox, brake, and tire temperatures are predicted—it's all done mathematically rather than with sensors—in three colors. Blue is for "warm-up," green is "go," and red means it's "over," as in "game over."

It was Ferrari chairman Luca di Montezemolo's idea to name the new car after Ferrari's homeland, and the 458 recalls bygone days when Ferraris were numbered by engine displacement in liters plus cylinder count (e.g.: the 1976-'84 512 Berlinetta Boxer). Overtones of Donkey Kong notwithstanding, the 458 should keep Ferrari on top as the producer of the world's most stimulating noisemakers. ■

EIGHT UNDER GLASS

Ferrari calls the 458's 4.5-liter, dry-sump, flat-plane-crank V-8 the F136FB, part of the family that includes the F136I in the California model and the F136E in the outgoing F430. All share bore centers and block basics, though only with the FB does Ferrari claim a world record for specific output in a nonturbo production engine: 125 horsepower and 89 pound-feet of torque per liter. Three developments were vital: direct fuel injection, friction reduction, and better breathing. The 2900-psi injection system and shell-shaped piston crowns tailor the injection charge to be rich at the plug and lean elsewhere, cooling down combustion temperatures and allowing the lofty, 12.5:1 compression ratio that better harnesses the fuel's energy. Piston skirts receive a graphite coating to reduce friction, and tappets get a slippery DLC, or "diamond-like carbon," coating developed for F1 engines. Deep in the block, pumping losses are stemmed by employing three electric scavenge pumps, one for the inner-four piston bays and one each for the outer four. These pumps both return the oil to the reservoir and also better equalize the air pressure between the bays to reduce pumping losses due to "windage," or air movement inside the block caused by piston motion. Ferrari says windage losses in the old F136E knocked almost seven pound-feet off its torque output. —AR

What Matters to You?

Today, America needs fresh leadership to lead us as a nation out of this economic crisis. Leadership must come not only from our political leaders but also from the average citizen. The exporting of American jobs is a trend that must be stopped and reversed. When I walk into my local hardware store, I typically find 85% of the goods for sale are manufactured 7,000 miles away. Recognizable American brands have been forced by shortsighted management and buyers at large national chains to build factories overseas just to save a lousy \$.50 on a tape measure. To these ruthless buyers, it is all about the money. Rarely are product quality, the political system, human rights, animal rights and environmental costs to the planet considered, not to mention the cost to our society of exporting not only jobs, but an entire factory!

At MacNeil Automotive, we are doing our part for the American economy and for our 300 million fellow citizens and neighbors. My philosophy is that if my neighbor doesn't have a job, sooner or later I won't have a job either. For example, we used to have our All-Weather Floor Mats manufactured in England by a company that used antiquated, inefficient equipment. They made a decent floor mat for us, but we thought we could build a better floor mat for our customers using modern American technology, American raw materials and skilled American workers. So in 2007 we transferred all of our floor mat manufacturing back to the United States. Today, we build the best fitting, highest quality automotive floor mats in the world, right here in America.

Our machine shop is equipped with 17 CNC machining centers including four 4 axis mills and one 5 axis mill that produce between 30 to 50 injection and thermoforming molds per month. We have one shift of highly skilled American Journeymen toolmakers and apprentices, but our machines run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There is not a more efficient tool and mold making operation in the world - and guess what, it's right here in America.

Weather



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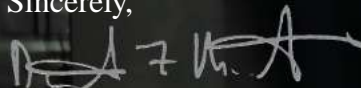
Furthermore, all of our CNC mills are manufactured in Oxnard, CA by Haas. Our 1,000 ton injection molding machines are made in Bolton, Ontario of American and Canadian components. Our thermoforming machinery is made in Carol Stream, IL. The raw steel and aluminum billets which make up our tooling are sourced from American steel and aluminum mills such as Vista Metals in Fontana, CA. The raw materials that make up our All-Weather Floor Mats, FloorLiners, Cargo Liners and Mud Flaps are manufactured in Bellevue OH, Arlington TX, Wichita KS and Jasper TN. Our forklifts are made in Columbus IN and Greene NY. Our warehouse racking is manufactured in Tatamy PA.

At MacNeil Automotive, we are also very aware of sustainability and our responsibility to the environment. We are proactive in controlling waste and recycling all of the unused raw materials from the manufacture of our tooling and products including: aluminum, steel, rubber, TPO, TPE, paper and cardboard.

As you can see, we are as dedicated to designing, developing and manufacturing the finest automotive accessories for our consumer and OEM clients as we are passionate about supporting the American economy, preserving the American industrial infrastructure, and keeping the "money" in our family, a family of 300 million people from all over America.

Life is simple; be good to your fellow man, be kind to animals and the environment, and place building a quality product, supporting your country and your fellow American worker before profit. And, one last thing - let's all do our best to balance family time with work time as our children are the future of America.

Sincerely,



David MacNeil, Founder/CEO
dmacneil@macneil.com

MacNeil
AUTOMOTIVE
PRODUCTS LIMITED
Specialists in Original Equipment and
Aftermarket Automotive Accessories

LIGHTNING LAP #4 CAR AND DRIVER

**WE LET LOOSE 22 OF THE HOTTEST NEW CARS ON EARTH
ON VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY.
IT MUST BE OUR ANNUAL LIGHTNING LAP BLOWOUT!**

THE 4.1-MILE GRAND WEST COURSE AT VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY, near Danville, Virginia, is the best place in the U.S. to evaluate a car's prowess at the ragged edge of the handling envelope. It features long straightaways, plenty of them, elevation changes, and all manner of corners, from tight hairpins to long sweepers, many of them dauntingly linked together. It's where we've been running our annual Lightning Lap competition since its inauguration in 2006, and this ultra-challenging terrain is our preferred venue for teasing out a car's ultimate performance. Beyond outright speed and lap time, though, max-attack laps on this track reveal just how well a car communicates and interacts with its driver and how easy (or not) it is to extract that performance. In the final analysis, Lightning Lap also tells us how much fun a car is to drive.

by **K. C. COLWELL, MARK GILLIES,
TONY QUIROGA, AND DAVE VANDERWERP**
illustration by **KAKO** *photography by* **MARC URBANO**



For the fourth edition of Lightning Lap, we have gathered 22 all-new or revised performance cars. As with the previous invitations, we grouped the cars in five classes according to price. But for the first time, we brought a couple of track-day specials to compete alongside regular production vehicles in a new class called LLU (for Unclassified). The segments are as follows:

- LL1: Less than \$30,000
- LL2: \$30,000–\$60,000
- LL3: \$60,000–\$120,000
- LL4: \$120,000–\$240,000
- LL5: More than \$240,000
- LLU: Not street-legal

The lap times published on the following pages represent the best run each car achieved during our two-day event. There were some very fast times posted in LL3, LL5, and LLU; however, nothing topped the 2008 performances of the Mosler MT900S and the Dodge Viper SRT10 ACR. But those are hardly everyday drivers, whereas the 2009 champ is a civilized daily ride. As ever, there were some memorable surprises in the machinery.

THE RULES >

The cars featured here are all unmodified production vehicles, although we did request models fitted with performance options such as larger brakes, sport suspensions, and the most advantageous wheel-and-tire packages. Each car got premium fuel, tires set to the manufacturers' recommended pressures, and a Race-logic VBOX GPS-based data logger suctioned to the windshield to record lap times and performance figures. The four drivers were K.C. Colwell, Mark Gillies, Tony Quiroga, and Dave VanderWerp. Each driver cycled through his assigned cars at least twice.

TRACK TIMES

This is the fourth time *Car and Driver* has run the Lightning Lap event on the VIR Grand West Course. Technically, a car competes only with others in its class, but to illustrate whether a car under- or overachieved relative to vehicles in other classes, we are publishing the times of every car tested, along with its class and the year of the event, along the bottom of the feature's pages.

THE CONTENDERS

	BASE PRICE/ PRICE AS TESTED	POWER, BHP	WEIGHT, POUNDS
LL1			
Ford Mustang GT	\$28,845 / \$34,665	315	3552
Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	\$25,750 / \$32,875	306	3500
Mazdaspeed 3	\$23,945 / \$25,840	263	3268
Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	\$29,200 / \$31,550	208	2674
Subaru Impreza WRX	\$26,190 / \$30,690	265	3242
Volkswagen GTI	\$24,839 / \$27,205	200	3178
LL2			
Audi S4	\$46,725 / \$60,075	333	4093
Audi TTS	\$46,325 / \$52,125	265	3284
BMW M3	\$59,975 / \$69,275	414	3606
Chevrolet Camaro SS	\$31,595 / \$36,265	426	3859
Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	\$55,720 / \$57,310	436	3329
Ford Shelby GT500	\$48,175 / \$50,895	540	3935
Nissan NISMO 370Z	\$39,850 / \$39,945	350	3385
LL3			
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	\$106,620 / \$119,370	638	3379
Jaguar XKR	\$96,000 / \$97,000	510	4080
Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	\$76,120 / \$77,320	257	2013
Porsche Cayman S	\$60,995 / \$76,450	320	3165
Porsche 911 Carrera S	\$87,795 / \$107,735	385	3340
LL4			
Audi R8 5.2 FSI	\$158,400 / \$171,600	525	3735
LL5			
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	\$458,395 / \$480,325	661	3889
LLU			
Ariel Atom 3	\$65,000 / \$85,479	300	1382
KTM X-Bow	\$78,500 / \$91,500 (est)	237	1816

LL1

VOLKSWAGEN GTI > 3:19.3

The quickest way around any track in a front-wheel-drive car requires the sort of patience only the parent of a tantrum-throwing two-year-old can know. The front-drivers we had at VIR suffered from prevailing understeer and required all the finesse our inner Fangio could summon.

While the GTI produced the slowest lap time of this event, the improvements over the previous, nearly identical 2007 GTI we drove at the 2006 Lightning Lap are nothing short of staggering. The biggest change to the 2010 model, aside from its sheetmetal, is a retuned suspension. This GTI improved by 5.8 seconds over the previous iteration, with sector-time enhancements across the board. Moreover, it was 2.5 seconds quicker than the more powerful, 250-hp VW R32 from the '08 event.

Despite persistent understeer, the GTI never felt unsettled or out of its "happy" operating range. It was calm and collected when climbing through the esses, with its 2.0-liter

turbo four working hard and the steering communicating telepathically to the driver—an unusual trait for a front-drive car. The stability control can't be turned off completely, but the car's quickest lap time had not one moment of electronic interference.

MINI COOPER JOHN COOPER WORKS > 3:17.1

In previous tests of this car, we had trouble discovering the benefit of the \$6500 Works upgrade that yields 36 more horsepower (208 in all) over the one-step-down model, the Mini Cooper S. But with a top speed 8 mph higher around VIR (121.0 mph) and a lap time quicker by 5.8 seconds than the Cooper S's, the extra power is clearly quantifiable.

The bone-jarring suspension of the Works car made it the least forgiving of the LL1 cars. However, its aggressive suspension, in combination with a short wheelbase, allowed the driver to rotate the tail while trail-braking toward an apex, a sought-after dynamic ability absent from the other front-drivers. Getting back on the throttle too early caused power understeer and spun the inside wheel. Lifting off the throttle midcorner will rotate the Mini, too, but that is not the quick way to execute a corner. As long as the driver knows the extra

3:29.3 MAZDA MX-5 (LL1, 2006) • 3:26.6 VOLVO C30 VERSION 2.0 (LL1, 2008) • 3:26.5 HONDA CIVIC Si (LL1, 2006) • 3:25.1 VOLKSWAGEN GTI (LL1, 2006) • 3:24.8 HONDA CIVIC Si MUGEN (LL2, 2008) •

**THE MUSTANG GT IMPRESSED
WITH ITS WILLINGNESS TO ROTATE,
ITS ALWAYS-GREAT V-8 BLARE, AND
A FAITHFUL FIVE-SPEED SHIFTER.**



TRACK NOTES: Oak Tree corner is named—surprise—for the large tree that lives on the inside of the turn. One of VIR's slowest corners, it leads onto the second-longest straightaway, where the fastest cars were reaching more than 150 mph.

3 : 1 3 . 3

FORD MUSTANG GT



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAME HERE

3:22.9 MINI COOPER S (LL1, 2007) • **3:21.8** VOLKSWAGEN R32 (LL2, 2008) • **3:20.9** FORD MUSTANG GT (LL1, 2006) • **3:20.8** DODGE CALIBER SRT4 (LL1, 2008) • **3:20.6** CHEVROLET COBALT SS SUPERCHARGED (LL1, 2006) •

PHOTOGRAPHY by NAME HERE

yaw is imminent, smooth, defined steering inputs will allow the car to exit the corner front end forward.

One thing the package doesn't include—and we wish it did—is a sportier seat with more lateral support. Lapping the Mini at VIR required a lot of bracing of the legs, which resulted in a sore left knee after three or four consecutive laps.

SUBARU IMPREZA WRX > 3:16.6

The latest WRX still has us scratching our collective heads. On a drag strip, it equals the quarter-mile time (13.5 seconds) of its big brother, the STI, and is 2.4 seconds quicker around the Virginia racetrack than the STI we lapped in 2008. Subaru, tell us: Why does the more expensive, presumably higher-zoot STI exist if it can't outperform its little brother, the WRX? Despite outshining the STI, the WRX laps didn't go without a little fear and loathing. For example, after one hot lap, early braking at the end of the front straight suggested the binders had perhaps taken the rest of the day off, although not to the hair-raising degree that the Nissan NISMO 370Z's did. (More on that later.) Brake fade was severe enough that the pedal would sink nearly all the way to the floor, making heel-and-toe downshifting impossible. So we pumped worriedly on the brakes with the left foot, tried to match the revs with the right foot, and with no feet left with which to operate the clutch, simply attempted to time the gearshifts just right.

Most four-wheel-drive cars should come with the following instructions: "Divebomb the corner under braking, turn hard, and mash the gas." The WRX is no different. Finding the fast line took more creativity than with other cars in this class, and the word "manhandle" turned up a number of times in the logbook notes.

Sometimes what seems like abuse produces a positive result, like fraternity hell week. The WRX was not only quicker through sector four than all other cars in this group, but it beat up on some bigger boys: the Audi S4, the Chevrolet Camaro SS, the Ford Shelby GT500, the Jaguar XKR, and the NISMO Z.

MAZDASPEED 3 > 3:16.2

The 263-hp, 2.3-liter four makes this the hot-rod front-driver of LL1, although, as with most of its brethren, brake fade under hard driving was its most worrisome aspect. But the Mazdaspeed 3 didn't suffer from this as badly as did the WRX.

The new Speed 3 is almost mechanically identical, save minor tweaks, to the last-gen car



TRACK NOTES: Sector 5—Hog Pen corner—leads onto the main straightaway, so a swift exit is vital for good lap times. The VW GTI hit 116.6 mph at the end of the straight, slowest of the 22 cars, after leaving this last corner at 85.9 mph.

3 : 1 7 . 1

MINI COOPER
JOHN COOPER WORKS



3 : 1 6 . 2

MAZDASPEED 3




3:19.3 VOLKSWAGEN GTI (LL1, 2009) • **3:19.0** SUBARU IMPREZA WRX STI (LL2, 2008) • **3:19.0** MAZDA RX-8 (LL1, 2006) • **3:18.2** DODGE CHARGER SRT8 (LL2, 2006) • **3:17.5** INFINITI G37S (LL2,




3 : 1 9 . 3
VOLKSWAGEN GTI



3 : 1 6 . 6
SUBARU IMPREZA WRX



3 : 1 4 . 8
HYUNDAI GENESIS
COUPE 3.8



we tested at VIR in 2007. The change that has affected its track performance in a big way is the new car's electrohydraulic power-steering unit. The old Speed 3 had a traditional, hydraulic power-steering unit because, Mazda insiders say, an electrohydraulic unit (used in the standard Mazda 3) could not keep up with the sawing of the steering wheel that happens at a track. For our two cents, Mazda should have stuck with the hydraulic setup in the Speed 3: During our first session, the steering got heavy at Turn Four, and the assist completely gave out on the third turn of the uphill esses. It then returned to normal by the Oak Tree turn. The electro unit also gave back less feel, leaving us guessing about traction levels.

At first, we couldn't understand why the Speed 3 could only manage a lap time of 3:16.2, 0.2 second slower than the little Mazda's performance of '07. Then we looked at the specs. This Speed 3 was nearly 200 pounds heavier than the previous car, moving the power-to-weight ratio from 11.7 pounds per horsepower to 12.4. That's a change that would indicate at least a 0.2-second backslide.

HYUNDAI GENESIS COUPE 3.8 > 3:14.8

For reasons that defy the most routine logic, Hyundai lent us a six-speed-automatic version of its 306-hp rear-drive pony car instead of one equipped with a six-speed manual. And that automatic was this car's greatest weakness.

When too much heat builds up in the transmission during hard lapping, electronic safeguards cause it to short-shift. It then takes a lap to recover. Also, there are two places where the car needs to be in second gear—Oak Tree and the Spiral—and the transmission, no matter how many times the manumatic paddle shifter was tapped and prodded, would not select it. The ZF six-speed is one of the finest automatics on the market, but a transmission is no good on a track if it won't follow commands.

The optional track-tuned suspension, part of the Track package, is too taut for daily-driver duty but felt right at home at VIR: It delivered lots of feel without abrupt oversteer. With Brembo-supplied brake hardware, also part of the optional Track equipment, there was none of the brake fade plaguing most of the LL1 competitors. If Hyundai can supply us with a manual gearbox next time, we think the Genesis has a shot at grabbing the LL1 crown from the reigning 2006 Nissan 350Z Track (3:12.5).

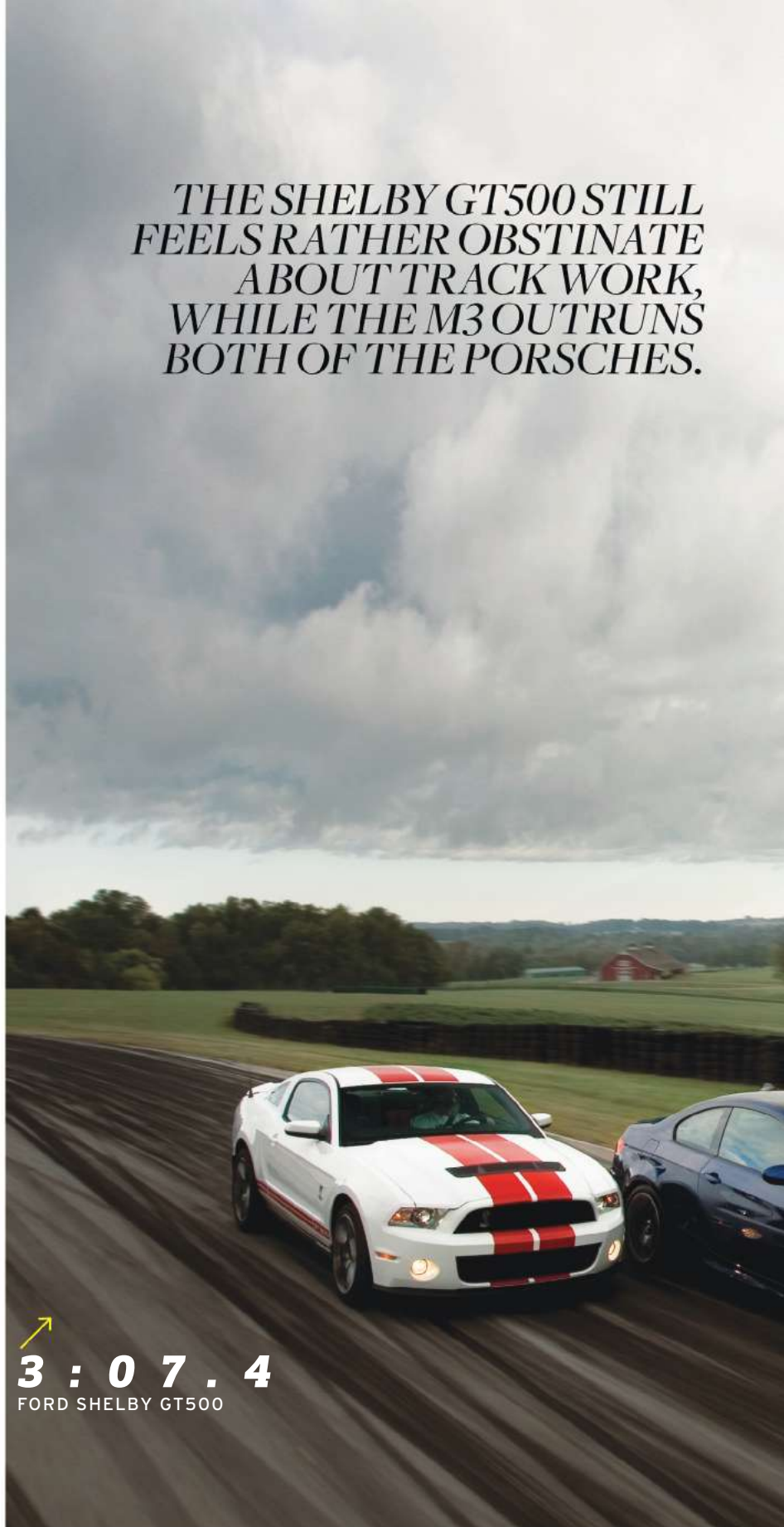
FORD MUSTANG GT > 3:13.3

The quickest entry in LL1 proved once again just how large a role tires play in performance. Our Mustang GT showed up wearing the wrong tires, so while we waited for a set of Pirelli P Zeros (part of the \$1530 Track pack) to arrive, we turned a couple of educational practice laps. The Mustang was noncommittal on turn-in and floppy and floaty through the esses. Great, we thought, another flaccid pony car that doesn't know how to turn.

Once the P Zeros arrived, though, we would have believed that the entire suspension had been overhauled. There was noticeably more grip everywhere, leading to lap times that were worlds—more than five seconds—quicker. Particularly impressive was the Mustang's poise through the esses, where it averaged 109.4 mph, outrunning its rock-star big brother, the Shelby GT500. Indeed, despite the Shelby's 225-hp advantage, the off-the-rack Mustang GT unceremoniously laid the smackdown on the supercharged snake, turning quicker times through sectors one, two, and four.

The Mustang impressed with its willingness to rotate, its always-great V-8 blare, and a faithful five-speed shifter. It could use more brakes—after one hard lap they start to go soft—as well as calmer steering to cut back on its darty behavior. Nonetheless, the Mustang posted the third-quickest LL1 time ever, bettering the previous Mustang GT by nearly eight seconds and usurping some notable LL2 cars from 2008, including the Audi S5 and the BMW 135i. Not bad for a solid-rear-axle pony car.

THE SHELBY GT500 STILL FEELS RATHER OBSTINATE ABOUT TRACK WORK, WHILE THE M3 OUTFRONS BOTH OF THE PORSCHEs.



3 : 0 7 . 4
FORD SHELBY GT500



3:16.2 MAZDASPEED 3 (LL1, 2009) • **3:16.0** MAZDASPEED 3 (LL1, 2007) • **3:15.7** PONTIAC SOLSTICE GXP (LL1, 2007) • **3:15.0** HONDA S2000 CR (LL2, 2008) • **3:14.8** HYUNDAI GENESIS COUPE 3.8 (LL1,

LL2

NISSAN NISMO 370Z > 3:12.0

We struggled to get a good lap time out of the NISMO 370Z, although it did beat the previous-gen Z car (equipped with the Track package) by half a second. Part of the NISMO's problem is that it feels heavy despite a relatively modest 3385-pound curb weight. Great track cars seem to shrink the harder they're driven, but not the Z. Even with enormous grip from its Yokohama Advan Sports, the Z feels uncomfortable and slightly disconnected when pressed. A high-effort shifter fights quick gearchanges, and the 350-hp V-6's character turns coarse as it runs to redline. We also wondered whether all 350 ponies showed up.

But what made the Z the least track-worthy car we've ever tested at Lightning Lap were its brakes. A glance at the wheels reveals some impressive hardware—a four-piston setup in front and two-piston calipers clamping the rear rotors. The Virginia track has two major braking events, and both require the Z's brakes

to withstand deceleration from about 130 mph down to 40 mph. In every other car we've tested at VIR, brake fade emerges gradually: Longer pedal travel and extra effort required to slow for a corner serve as warnings that the brakes are getting too hot. But in the Z, *with no warning*, the brakes went from fully effective to missing in action in a single, disastrous stop from 130 mph. The pedal collapsed to the floor, and what remained of the braking power was only able to slow the car at a rate very much like stopping on snow. Fortunately, no one was injured when the brakeless missile introduced itself to a retaining wall so enthusiastically that it had to be removed using heavy equipment.

AUDI S4 > 3:10.8

As is typical with Audi, the latest S4 continues to hang its engine over the front-axle line, thus burdening its front wheels with 57 percent of the car's weight, an arrangement ill-suited to track work. And yet, the 4093-pound S4 turns in and corners like no other Audi sedan in recent memory. Some of the responsiveness is due to the new active rear differential that apportions torque to either wheel to influence the direction of the car. Coupled with quick (2.2 turns lock-to-lock) active steering, the S4



WHY THE NISMO BIT IT

After our crash, Nissan investigated the problem, which was unnervingly similar to a brake-fade issue on the Infiniti FX that necessitated a hardware change. It says that this pad material was designed for low noise and low dust, and not for track use. Based on our accident, Nissan is offering a high-performance pad as a dealer-installed option on any Sport-package Z. Our Nissan contacts tell us they're lobbying to make these pads standard on the NISMO, which is how this track-based car should have been equipped in the first place. We'll be testing the new versus old pads soon.

3 : 0 5 . 4

BMW M3



TRACK NOTES: The highest point on the Grand West Course, 500 feet above sea level, is at the end of the back straightaway. The ensuing hairpin bend is approached uphill, demands patience, then plunges downhill into the Spiral.

3 : 1 2 . 0
NISSAN NISMO 370Z



3 : 1 0 . 8
AUDI S4



TRACK NOTES: The first set of esses at VIR (above left) is taken flat-out after a car sails through the initial right-hander. After a short straightaway, cars arrive at the Climbing Esses, approached at nearly 120 mph in the Camaro SS.

flies into corners with uncanny ease. So eager was turn-in that we dialed the active steering program from sport to auto to slow down its response.

In high-speed corners, the S4's turn-in zeal was a bit spooky. In the downhill left-hander after the uphill esses, the active differential seemed to want to heave the rear end of the car through the corner ahead of the front. Dialing the diff from sport to auto didn't seem to improve this situation, and hot rear tires only exaggerated the effect. On public roads, the S4 never exhibits such behavior.

Otherwise, the S4 is plenty powerful in its new supercharged guise and has excellent brakes and good grip—until the tires get too hot. Despite 87 fewer horses, the S4 was 0.4 second quicker than the Audi RS 4 from the second Lightning Lap.

CHEVROLET CAMARO SS > 3:09.5

It might feel as wide as Nebraska and offer the outward visibility of a corn maze, but the Camaro SS is actually quite at home on the racetrack. Helping to offset its husky build is a 426-hp V-8 that delivers power in such an effortless manner that we occasionally bumped into the rev limiter. A large shift knob nearly the size of a baseball

moves through longish throws that require a firm hand, but tall gearing and abundant torque reduce the number of shifts required per lap.

The Camaro leans slightly before it takes a set, and this initial roll compliance, combined with sluggish steering, is immediately noticeable on turn-in. It was especially apparent through the uphill esses, which require subtle, quick transitions from left to right. It all adds up to a momentary hesitation before the Camaro takes the desired course, and this minor delay made the car feel massive as it sluiced through the esses, exhibiting the gracelessness of a freighter.

But once the Camaro is turned into a corner, the chassis hunkers down and the Pirelli P Zero tires deliver confidence-inspiring, easy-to-manage grip. GM wisely fits large, fade-resistant Brembos to the SS model. Pedal feel is firm, and the brakes are up to the task of reeling in the Camaro's 3859-pound curb weight.

3 : 0 9 . 5
CHEVROLET CAMARO SS



AUDI TTS > 3:08.4

One of the big surprises of this event was Audi's TTS. Quite possibly the easiest of the assembled cars to drive quickly around the track, the little sports car feels stable, light, and powerful. Wide Dunlop SP Sport Maxx GT tires grip tenaciously and break away gradually into understeer. Body roll is pretty much absent, and the constantly adjusting magnetorheological shocks seem to help keep the TTS calm and connected.

All-wheel drive ensures an idiot-proof application of its 265 horsepower to the pavement. The dual-clutch gearbox shifts instantly and downshifts without upsetting the chassis. Though not as powerful or fade-free as the brakes of the Porsches, the TTS seems eager to be hauled down from triple-digit speeds. In all, the TTS feels small, light, trusty, and powerful, and it makes us feel like better drivers.

FORD SHELBY GT500 > 3:07.4

Having the lesser Mustang GT on hand was not a good thing for the Shelby GT500. Although substantially more buttoned down, with far less pitch and roll after its 2010 overhaul, the GT500 still feels rather obstinate about working out on a track.

3:13.3 MITSUBISHI LANCER EVOLUTION MR (LL2, 2008) • 3:13.0 CHEVROLET COBALT SS (LL1, 2008) • 3:12.5 NISSAN 350Z TRACK (LL1, 2006) • 3:12.0 NISSAN NISMO 370Z (LL2, 2009) •

Mike Valentine:
Radar fanatic



"V1 is born of my personal passion for Situation Awareness. I want to know all the threats, as far away as possible."

"This is the *only* unit that can track radar and laser in 360 degrees..." — Popular Science

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3 : 0 8 . 4
AUDI TTS

2 : 5 8 . 8
CHEVROLET CORVETTE
GRAND SPORT



Is this surprising? Well, you don't have to be a Ford SVT engineer to know that adding almost 400 pounds—most of it over the front axle—in the transformation from Mustang GT to GT500 is not a step in the right direction. Indeed, driven back to back, the significantly less powerful and less expensive Mustang feels like a better car in every way—directional changes are more lithe and lively, turn-in is sharper, understeer is far less pronounced, and the brakes hold up longer.

But there's no denying 540 horsepower, and that's precisely how the GT500 managed to better the Mustang GT by nearly six seconds despite being outdone through many of the individual sectors. However, the latest GT500 wasn't as quick as its predecessor, which we suspect is a function of its supercharged engine being particularly susceptible to changes in ambient temperature. Lap-time

differences between running in the cool, 50-degree morning air and the heat of the day (about 75 degrees) were as high as four or five seconds, which is more than we've experienced with any other car.

While infinitely more capable than the pony cars of old, the Shelby remains a modern-day embodiment of the same narrowly focused credo: big speed in a straight line.

BMW M3 > 3:05.4

The M3 was invited back for a second Lightning Lap because of complaints last time regarding its seven-speed, dual-clutch M DCT gearbox not following commands, particularly on downshifts. And this time, the M3 was riding on the available Michelin Pilot Sport Cup + tires [see page 90].

Although the hot-rod Bimmer is always an impressive ride, with decidedly sports-car-like agility in a class of mostly heavy-weight bruisers, the M3's lap time improved by just 0.2 second. As we found with our recently concluded long-term M3, the Sport Cup + tires don't seem to shave a whole lot off lap times, and the dual-clutch gearbox was still occasionally reluctant to grant downshifts under braking. So drivers had to keep an eye on the

dash display—never a good thing for lap times—to verify which gear was in play.

Why our great love for the M3 then? Everyday usability? Check. Room for four adults? Check. Outrunning both of the lighter, costlier, and more performance-focused Porsches? Oh, yeah.

CHEVROLET CORVETTE GRAND SPORT > 2:58.8

Last year, a Corvette with the Z51 handling package produced a stellar 3:01.2 lap to lead the LL2 pack. The track suspension can no longer be optioned on a base Corvette, though it is part of the new Grand Sport's armament, which also includes Zo6 tires, footwear, and bodywork.

We expected the Grand Sport to better the Z51's time, and it did, by well over two seconds. Like all Corvettes, it has strong grip and excellent midrange power, with the added bonus of the Zo6's stunning brakes. And like all Corvettes, the steering lacks finesse, the seats suck, and a driver had better be comfortable with high-speed oversteer. Like the Zo6, the Grand Sport breaks away with a breathtaking quickness, which we put down to the characteristics of the Goodyear Eagle F1 Supercar tires. The uphill esses at this track are daunting in most cars, but this Corvette required a leap of faith through this snaky section.



TRACK NOTES: *The Climbing Esses (Sector 2) are the scariest part of the track because cars are changing direction at more than 100 mph. They're a great test of a car's body control and stability. The Corvette ZR1 exited at 110.4 mph.*

3:11.7 BMW Z4 M COUPE (LL2, 2007) • 3:11.2 AUDI RS 4 (LL3, 2007) • 3:11.0 FORD SHELBY GT500 (LL2, 2006) • 3:10.8 AUDI S4 (LL3, 2009) • 3:10.5 BMW 335i COUPE (LL2, 2007) •



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TRACK NOTES: Sector 4 is a series of medium-fast uphill turns that tests a car's grip, steering precision, and transient responses. Most of the apexes can't be seen until you're committed to the corner, so it's also a test of cojones.

3 : 0 5 . 0

LOTUS EXIGE S 260 SPORT



3 : 0 6 . 4

JAGUAR XKR



WE KNEW THE ZR1 CORVETTE WAS GOING TO BE FAST—BUT NOT THIS QUICK.



3:10.0 BMW M6 (LL3, 2006) • **3:09.5** CHEVROLET CAMARO SS (LL2, 2009) • **3:09.5** PORSCHE CAYMAN S (LL2, 2006) • **3:09.3** CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z51 (LL2, 2006) • **3:09.2** LOTUS ELISE (LL2, 2006) •

2 : 5 1 . 8

CHEVROLET
CORVETTE ZR1



LL3

JAGUAR XKR > 3:06.4

The XKR was a shock—that is, its lap time was. The newly revitalized R model, with a 510-hp, supercharged 5.0-liter V-8 underhood, is tremendous fun. It offers nicely balanced handling, excellent midrange power, a wickedly malevolent growl under hard throttle, and capable brakes, although they did finally give in to fade after repeated lappery.

The XKR's steering feels overly light on initial acquaintance but is very communicative when the car is pressed. Although the R's tail will easily get loose, oversteer is quite controllable and very predictable. We also like the quick-shifting automatic transmission controlled by paddles mounted on the steering wheel. Our only complaint, other than a lack of under-butt sculpting in the seat, is that the throttle pedal has a lot of friction near the end of its travel.

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA S > 3:05.8

Tucked under the decklid of the 911 Carrera S is a 3.8-liter engine whose placement and power make the 911 a completely different animal from the Porsche Cayman. With 385 horsepower and 310 pound-feet of torque, the 911 leaves corners with an urgency that is missing in the comparatively relaxed Cayman S. Down the front straight, the Carrera S kept on accelerating all the way to 141.7 mph, 7.2 mph faster than the Cayman S.



TRACK NOTES: The Corvette ZR1 took 14.5 seconds through Sector 4 compared with 14.8 for the Lotus and 15.4 for the Jaguar. The champ here, though, was the KTM X-Bow, which took just 13.6 seconds and generated 1.4 g of grip.

3:08.4 AUDI TTS (LL3, 2009) • 3:07.4 FORD SHELBY GT500 (LL2, 2009) • 3:06.5 MERCEDES-BENZ C63 AMG (LL2, 2008) • 3:06.4 JAGUAR XKR (LL3, 2009) • 3:05.9 FORD SHELBY GT500 (LL2, 2007) •

But through the corners, the 911 moves suddenly between easily managed corner-entry understeer to mild oversteer that reduces speeds and made the 911 ultimately slower than the Cayman S. Through the uphill esses, the 911 felt like the jumpy short-wheelbase, rear-engined car it is. Precise steering aside, the Carrera S nervously pitches and reacts to even the slightest kiss of the curbing. The brakes are strong, even by the 911's high standards.

Be aware that a 911 is not easily mastered, requiring equal parts bravery, skill, and a college course in vehicle dynamics. Shocked that the 911 ran the same time as the Cayman S, two of us drove it in an attempt to beat the Cayman. We both returned with identical times (3:05.8).

PORSCHE CAYMAN S > 3:05.8

Down 65 horsepower to the 911 Carrera S, the 320-hp Cayman S still managed to match the time of its more powerful and expensive kin. How'd that happen? Credit the balanced mid-engined chassis that provides abundant, easy-to-exploit grip.

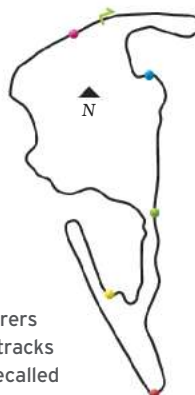
Delicate and accurate steering gives the Cayman the sharpness to cut into corners. In the uphill esses, the Cayman S felt far more

ELECTRON LAP

We'd heard that iRacing's Internet-based motorsports simulation—"game" is a dirty word to iRacing—is so lifelike that Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Marcos Ambrose use it, so we asked iRacing to set up a virtual lap of the Grand West Course at VIR.

iRacing says its secret to delivering hyper-real thrills is to work with car and tire manufacturers on physics and to laser-scan the tracks it offers. We were impressed; it recalled track nuances we'd forgotten, although we did find portions of VIR between sectors three and four to be slightly different in reality. As a learning tool, the cars in iRacing will spin, understeer, and oversteer like the genuine article. But without g-forces to warn of slip angles, a driver has to rely purely on vision to "feel" the car's behavior.

iRacing can only be "played" and downloaded from the Internet. Most personal computers built in the past three years will run the program with ease—Mac owners who run Windows can also play. Subscriptions ranging from one month (\$14) up to two years (\$179) are available. New players start with three cars and seven racetracks (additional tracks are \$11.95 to \$14.95, and adding a car costs \$14.95). It's not the real thing, but the adrenaline iRacing produces is very real. Plus, it's much cheaper than actual racing.



3 : 0 5 . 8
PORSCHE 911 CARRERA S



3:05.8 PORSCHE CAYMAN S (LL3, 2009) • **3:05.8** PORSCHE 911 CARRERA S (LL3, 2009) • **3:05.8** PORSCHE 911 TURBO (LL4, 2007) • **3:05.6** BMW M3 (LL2, 2008) • **3:05.4** BMW M3 (LL2, 2009) •

3 : 0 5 . 8
PORSCHE CAYMAN S



DOWN 65 HORSEPOWER TO THE 911 S, THE 320-HP CAYMAN S STILL MANAGED TO MATCH ITS TIME.

stable than the 911, which always threatens to wag its engine-harboring tail. Touching the curbing upsets the balance almost insignificantly, and the car's movements seem to occur in slow motion: There's nothing alarming, no surprises. Typical for a Porsche, the brakes have an easily modulated, firm pedal and offer the reassuring feel necessary for stress-free late braking.

Equipped with Porsche's PDK dual-clutch gearbox, the Cayman S shifts quickly and nearly imperceptibly, but we became annoyed by the steering-wheel-mounted push buttons that control upshifts and downshifts. Eventually, we acclimated to the nonintuitive button commands, although we gave up on upshifting in both Porsches because under full throttle, shifts happen automatically at redline no matter which mode is selected. Accelerating out of corners, the Cayman S's horsepower deficit to the 911's is obvious, but the less powerful Porsche's stability, grip, and precision are why the 911 is the only car that still hangs its engine behind the rear wheels.

LOTUS EXIGE S 260 SPORT > 3:05.0

Lotus seems to have exceeded the point of diminishing returns with this car. For \$76,120—that's nine grand and change more than the next-rung-down Exige S 240 and

almost \$28,000 more than a base Elise, all of which share the same basic chassis—the 260 Sport gets various carbon-fiber body panels and other lightweight bits, such as forged alloy wheels, that reduce weight by a not-insignificant 50 pounds versus the Exige S 240. The 260 also bears 17 additional horsepower, for a grand total of 257. Although this new model mustered an extra 5 mph down the front straight over last year's Exige (which made 220 horses), the increased power was otherwise indiscernible, as the 260 Sport was slower through four of the five sectors and a half-second behind overall.

Still, other than its balky shifter, which we've often complained about, and a resistance to rotate under trail braking that was likely a quirk of our particular test car, the Exige is totally at home on a track, with laser-sharp steering and indefatigable brakes. It's like the LLU class's Ariel Atom 3 and KTM X-Bow in that it's content to run at 10/10ths all day long without rapidly eating up the tires, and there is zero brake fade. But keep in mind that the Lotus is cheaper than those two and also is street-legal.

CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR1 > 2:51.8

We knew the ZR1 was going to be fast—but not this quick. Only two cars have gone faster than

the ZR1 in our Lightning Lap challenge, but both of them—the Mosler MT900S and the Dodge Viper SRT10 ACR, from the 2008 event—are much more in their element on a track than on a street. Yet the Corvette combines startling pace around VIR with lots of luggage space, plus a tractable engine, good visibility, and a supple ride.

That's not to say that extracting a good lap from the ZR1 is easy. First, it carries huge speed everywhere, so judging braking distances is tricky. Then, it has outrageous amounts of power, so it's easy to overwhelm the rear tires, which leads to entertaining sideways heroics but is not so good for lap times. It requires finesse to manage the traction circle in this car. And the steering is a little bit vague.

Against that, the ZR1 has *Ohmigod!* brakes, stellar thrust, and a relatively faithful chassis, helped along by its Michelin Pilot Sport PS2 tires that are much more progressive than the Goodyear Eagle F1 Supercars on lesser Corvettes. The ZR1 was 2.8 seconds quicker than the Ferrari 430 Scuderia and 3.8 seconds up on the Nissan GT-R (both from the 2008 event). All other things being equal, that's what a power-to-weight ratio of 5.3 pounds per horsepower will do for a car's performance.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62



3:05.0 LOTUS EXIGE S 260 SPORT (LL3, 2009) • 3:04.6 AUDI R8 (LL3, 2007) • 3:04.5 LOTUS EXIGE S (LL3, 2007) • 3:04.0 CADILLAC CTS-V (LL2, 2008) • 3:03.6 CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z51 (LL2, 2007) •

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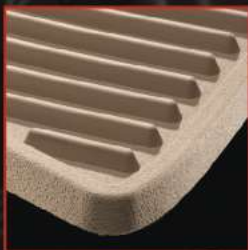
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LL4

AUDI R8 5.2 FSI > 2:59.5

We continue to marvel at how comprehensively Audi nailed its first attempt at a supercar, particularly when the R8's newly available, Lamborghini-sourced, 525-hp screaming V-10 is installed. Long Porsche's forte, the fluidity of the R8 imparts instant confidence that makes the driver feel completely safe while doing seemingly crazy things such as averag-

ing 114 mph through this racetrack's intimidating esses (search "R8 VIR" on YouTube to see a spectacular example of how badly this section can go) or seeing the little needle climb to "150" on the front straight, the third-loftiest speed of the day.

Although its predictability makes the Corvettes feel leery by comparison, the R8 isn't quite a track-day special. It understeers annoyingly, particularly into corners with no elevation change, although its rear-biased all-wheel drive allows for power oversteer on corner exit. And its brakes, while above average among sports cars, aren't as strong as the Corvettes'. Also, under maximum deceleration

from high speed, the R8 gets a bit squirmy. Unlike the higher-tech dual-clutch automated manuals of the 911 and the BMW M3, the R8's single-clutch unit never second-guessed our paddle-shift inputs, even though it took slightly more time to execute an upshift and the actual shifts are harsher.

Considering the R8's effortlessness, we were almost surprised to find that it joined the sub-three-minute club. That's a dramatic, 5.1-second improvement around the Virginia track over the V-8-powered R8 and makes the mid-engined hunk the all-time LL4 champ, bettering the mighty 550-hp Ford GT's 2006 lap time by more than a second.

2 : 5 9 . 5

AUDI R8 5.2 FSI



TRACK NOTES: Sector 3 is called the Spiral, and it's easy to overdrive cars through this tight section. Stability while turning and braking is vital, as is good traction. The Audi R8 was marginally faster here than the Lamborghini.

LL5

LAMBORGHINI MURCIÉLAGO LP670-4 SV > 2:53.9

At \$480,325, the LP670-4 SuperVeloce is the most expensive car ever to run in Lightning Lap. It's also the best-sounding—and the loudest, with an engine wail and bellow that could trigger car alarms in the next county. One of our test drivers went out for a fun run without a helmet and later complained of hearing loss.

Getting the best out of this lighter and more powerful Murciélago is tricky. On the first day, it had transmission sulk. On the second morning, it just understeered everywhere, and its pace wasn't helped by gearing that's set up for space exploration: We had to use first gear in a couple of places, which didn't seem quite right. The fixed backrest of the seat is awful, too, pushing a helmeted head too far forward for comfort.

Eventually, the Lambo came alive when we really started pushing it and the track warmed up: Some of the rear-end grip went away, which allowed us to rotate the big Lambo into corners and get the power down sooner.

On a hot lap, the Lambo was magnificent, combining an operatic soundtrack with huge grip, delicious steering, and formidable brakes. Unlike the ZR1, which oversteers at the merest suggestion of the concept, the Lambo is more neutral and precise, characteristics that are reflected in the two cars' respective paces through the uphill esses, although the Murcié still needs a sure hand for quick times. In essence, it lost out to the ZR1 because it has a slightly inferior power-to-weight ratio as well as tall gearing that slows its acceleration out of corners. But the two were dead even at the end of both straightaways, with a top speed just past 157 mph into the first corner.

*THE LAMBO HAS AN ENGINE WAIL
AND BELLOW THAT COULD TRIGGER
CAR ALARMS IN THE NEXT COUNTY.*

2 : 53 . 9

LAMBORGHINI
MURCIÉLAGO LP670-4 SV



LLU

ARIEL ATOM 3 > 2:57.6

KTM X-BOW > 2:52.3

For the first time, we brought a couple of track machines to our Lightning Lap bash. One, the Ariel Atom 3, can be bought in the U.S.; the other, the KTM X-Bow, can't.

The Atom is a pared-down, no-nonsense track weapon powered by a supercharged, 300-hp Honda engine. It's wickedly fast in a straight line, at least until its blocky aerodynamics come into play, and it brakes and corners like a two-seat formula car.

But it wasn't quite as fast as we expected, simply because it's a touch nervous. Back off the throttle too quickly while turning into a

corner, and the back end jumps out in a hurry. Apply a touch too much power too early, and the tail also threatens to head off into the undergrowth. Judging braking distances is also tricky because it's quite easy to lock a front wheel. Essentially, the Atom feels like a 1970s formula car, only with a little less finesse and gobs more horsepower. Still, it's a blast—literally and metaphorically.

The X-Bow, by contrast, is more like a modern race car, a superbly stable platform that storms corners. Like the Atom, its aerodynamics kill top speed, but the downforce generated by the body shape keeps it far more planted in high-speed corners and under braking. Indeed, the X-Bow's stopping and cornering are so good that, despite a peak speed down the straightaway that was 25.7 mph slower than the ZR1's, it was just half a second off the

über Corvette's lap time and more than two seconds up on the Ferrari 430 Scuderia's time from 2008.

The stiff structure helps the car in corners where aero grip isn't such an issue, and we were able to carry massive speed through the series of medium-speed curves on the backside of the course. Responses from the controls are wonderful and make even the Lamborghini feel like a blunt instrument. In short, the X-Bow provides the thrills of a modern-day formula car without having to go through the hassles of owning one—e.g., the ocean-front real estate, the trophy wives, etc.



TRACK NOTES: Both the Ariel and KTM track toys were way down on straight-line speed, hitting 135.4 mph and 131.7 mph, respectively, at the fastest point in Sector 1. The Lamborghini, by comparison, hit 157.5 mph.

VIDEO VBOX

Racelogic's latest creation, the Video VBOX, adds two cameras to the company's excellent GPS-based data-collection system, which we've long used for vehicle testing. Videos are completely customizable, and data including speed, g's, track maps, lap times, and even a realistic rendition of a car's gauges can be displayed concurrently. Vehicle info, such as throttle and brake positions, engine rpm, and steering angle, also can be harvested from the car's brain. The system didn't work flawlessly at VIR—a couple of times the data card was blank after a heroic lap—but when it did, the results were impressive (see CARandDRIVER.com/VBOXVideo). Prices range from \$1845 to \$4650 (www.vboxusa.com).



*APPLY TOO MUCH POWER TOO EARLY,
AND THE ARIEL ATOM THREATENS TO HEAD OFF
INTO THE UNDERGROWTH. THE KTM X-BOW,
BY CONTRAST, IS STABLE AND STORMS CORNERS.*

2 : 5 2 . 3

KTM X-BOW



2 : 5 7 . 6

ARIEL ATOM 3



THE RESULTS

■ LL1 ■ LL2 ■ LL3 ■ LL4 ■ LL5 ■ LLU
NOTE: BOLD NUMBERS ARE BEST IN CLASS

GRAND WEST COURSE VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY 4.1 MILES



OAK TREE

BACK STRAIGHT

500 Feet Above
Sea Level

SPIRAL

BITCH

SOUTH
BENDCLIMBING
ESSSES

SNAKE

OVERALL

	4.1-MILE ROAD COURSE, LAP TIME/MPH	PEAK SPEED, MPH
■ Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	2:51.8/85.9	157.4
■ KTM X-Bow	2:52.3/85.7	131.7
■ Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	2:53.9/84.9	157.5
■ Ariel Atom 3	2:57.6/83.1	135.4
■ Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	2:58.8/82.6	144.4
■ Audi R8 5.2 FSI	2:59.5/82.2	150.4
■ Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	3:05.0/79.8	129.6
■ BMW M3	3:05.4/79.6	139.5
■ Porsche Cayman S	3:05.8/79.4	134.5
■ Porsche 911 Carrera S	3:05.8/79.4	141.7
■ Jaguar XKR	3:06.4/79.2	144.9
■ Ford Shelby GT500	3:07.4/78.8	134.8
■ Audi TTS	3:08.4/78.3	129.5
■ Chevrolet Camaro SS	3:09.5/77.9	135.9
■ Audi S4	3:10.8/77.4	131.4
■ Nissan NISMO 370Z	3:12.0/76.9	127.2
■ Ford Mustang GT	3:13.3/76.4	127.4
■ Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	3:14.8/75.8	124.7
■ Mazdaspeed 3	3:16.2/75.2	123.3
■ Subaru Impreza WRX	3:16.6/75.1	120.2
■ Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	3:17.1/74.9	121.0
■ Volkswagen GTI	3:19.3/74.1	116.6

SECTOR 3

	ENTRY SPEED, MPH	MINIMUM SPEED, MPH	EXIT SPEED, MPH	SECTOR TIME, SEC
■ KTM X-Bow	98.4	40.4	74.3	12.0
■ Audi R8 5.2 FSI	89.5	41.9	76.6	13.0
■ Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	91.4	35.3	78.8	13.1
■ Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	86.9	40.5	78.7	13.1
■ BMW M3	83.9	37.2	71.0	13.1
■ Ariel Atom 3	93.3	30.6	77.2	13.1
■ Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	81.0	40.2	68.6	13.2
■ Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	89.5	36.2	71.1	13.2
■ Ford Shelby GT500	87.1	40.2	72.6	13.4
■ Audi TTS	89.6	43.1	70.8	13.5
■ Jaguar XKR	86.1	38.8	72.4	13.7
■ Audi S4	91.3	43.4	69.0	13.7
■ Nissan NISMO 370Z	81.0	40.7	66.0	13.7
■ Mazdaspeed 3	80.3	39.9	64.7	13.7
■ Porsche Cayman S	77.9	42.6	70.8	13.8
■ Chevrolet Camaro SS	86.2	40.4	71.4	13.9
■ Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	81.4	41.9	65.1	13.9
■ Porsche 911 Carrera S	83.2	40.3	74.7	14.0
■ Ford Mustang GT	75.0	38.1	68.1	14.0
■ Subaru Impreza WRX	79.0	40.6	67.0	14.0
■ Volkswagen GTI	78.9	35.9	63.9	14.0
■ Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	77.3	42.7	65.0	14.1

SECTOR 2

	ENTRY SPEED, MPH	AVERAGE SPEED, MPH	EXIT SPEED, MPH	SECTOR TIME, SEC
■ Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	139.1	119.9	109.4	8.1
■ Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	137.5	119.1	110.4	8.2
■ KTM X-Bow	119.8	118.3	114.2	8.2
■ BMW M3	123.6	116.1	105.1	8.4
■ Audi R8 5.2 FSI	126.6	114.2	107.9	8.5
■ Porsche 911 Carrera S	124.3	113.5	101.2	8.6
■ Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	129.0	114.2	110.4	8.6
■ Ariel Atom 3	126.1	113.7	107.2	8.6
■ Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	118.4	112.0	104.8	8.7
■ Ford Mustang GT	113.7	109.4	98.4	8.9
■ Jaguar XKR	126.7	108.6	100.7	9.0
■ Ford Shelby GT500	123.8	109.0	99.6	9.0
■ Mazdaspeed 3	110.2	108.8	101.8	9.0
■ Subaru Impreza WRX	108.2	107.2	102.5	9.1
■ Audi S4	112.4	105.3	100.2	9.3
■ Volkswagen GTI	106.1	104.9	100.5	9.3
■ Porsche Cayman S	114.3	104.6	100.3	9.4
■ Audi TTS	109.3	103.8	101.7	9.4
■ Nissan NISMO 370Z	112.0	104.1	101.2	9.4
■ Chevrolet Camaro SS	116.2	104.0	99.3	9.4
■ Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	109.6	104.0	99.9	9.4
■ Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	107.8	103.2	99.2	9.5

SECTOR 4

	ENTRY SPEED, MPH	AVERAGE SPEED, MPH	EXIT SPEED, MPH	SECTOR TIME, SEC
KTM X-Bow	71.3	83.3	89.1	13.6
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	66.7	77.9	91.6	14.4
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	65.3	77.0	91.0	14.5
Ariel Atom 3	71.4	77.1	89.5	14.5
Audi R8 5.2 FSI	69.5	76.1	81.7	14.8
Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	64.2	76.1	83.9	14.8
Porsche Cayman S	64.8	75.1	85.8	14.9
Porsche 911 Carrera S	67.7	75.1	87.7	14.9
Audi TTS	65.3	75.6	83.2	14.9
BMW M3	64.3	75.5	83.4	14.9
Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	62.7	75.2	82.1	15.0
Subaru Impreza WRX	66.4	73.8	81.3	15.2
Ford Mustang GT	66.2	73.6	83.6	15.3
Mazdaspeed 3	65.1	73.3	82.2	15.3
Jaguar XKR	61.7	73.0	83.9	15.4
Chevrolet Camaro SS	64.0	73.2	82.0	15.4
Ford Shelby GT500	62.0	73.2	82.2	15.4
Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	70.1	73.3	76.6	15.4
Audi S4	64.1	73.0	83.2	15.5
Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	66.7	72.4	77.6	15.5
Volkswagen GTI	66.1	72.5	77.8	15.5
Nissan NISMO 370Z	64.4	71.6	82.6	15.7

CARANDDRIVER.COM

WATCH STUNNING IN-CAR HOT LAPS OF THE ARIEL ATOM 3, AUDI R8 5.2 FSI, CHEVROLET CORVETTE ZR1, LAMBORGHINI MURCIELAGO LP670-4 SV, AND KTM X-BOW ON OUR WEBSITE.

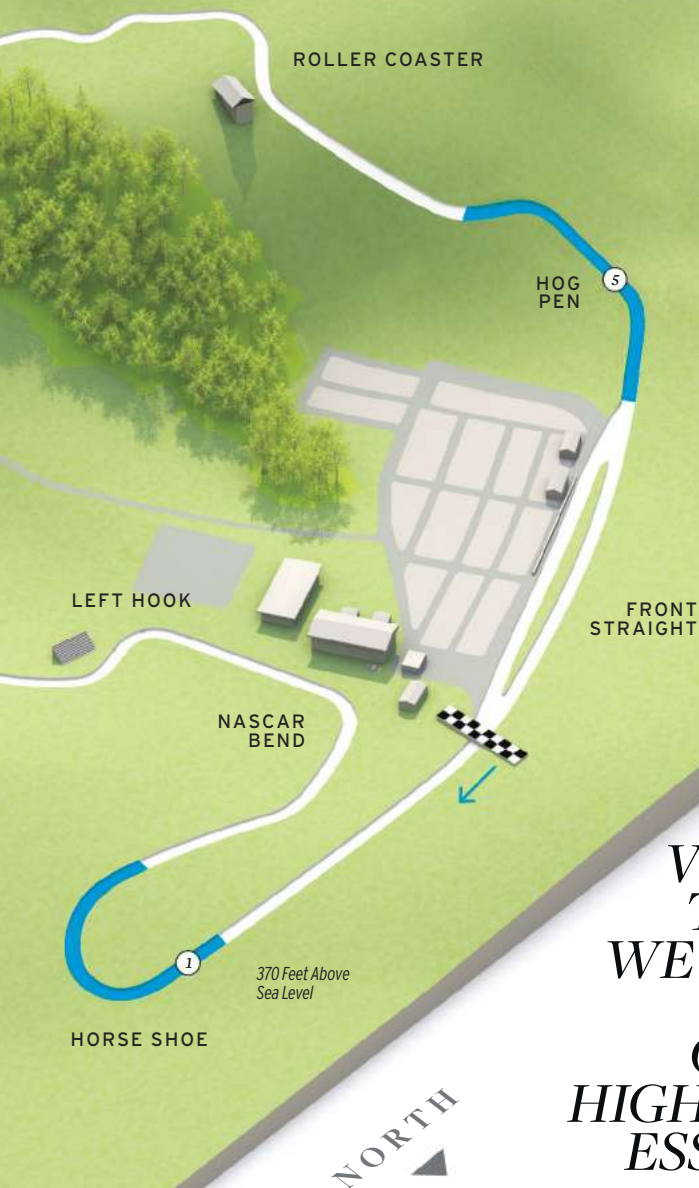
CARANDDRIVER.COM/LIGHTNINGVIDEO

SECTOR 5

	ENTRY SPEED, MPH	MIN. SPEED, MPH	EXIT SPEED, MPH	SECTOR TIME, SEC
KTM X-Bow	83.1	62.2	104.0	8.9
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	82.6	64.9	109.8	9.1
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	81.3	63.3	108.8	9.2
Audi R8 5.2 FSI	76.8	62.3	105.3	9.3
Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	72.8	64.9	103.0	9.4
Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	77.6	64.1	95.9	9.5
Ariel Atom 3	78.9	60.4	102.2	9.5
BMW M3	81.9	63.5	97.7	9.7
Nissan NISMO 370Z	74.0	60.6	94.3	9.7
Porsche Cayman S	73.6	61.3	96.9	9.8
Porsche 911 Carrera S	75.5	62.6	98.3	9.8
Audi TTS	75.3	61.5	94.1	9.8
Ford Shelby GT500	75.3	59.6	98.3	9.8
Jaguar XKR	76.7	61.4	88.5	9.9
Audi S4	72.3	60.9	93.9	9.9
Chevrolet Camaro SS	71.6	59.0	98.2	9.9
Ford Mustang GT	77.6	64.6	92.7	9.9
Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	72.4	63.5	91.5	9.9
Subaru Impreza WRX	72.0	60.9	91.3	10.1
Volkswagen GTI	76.3	60.3	85.9	10.1
Mazdaspeed 3	79.5	59.4	89.6	10.2
Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	73.8	59.2	86.9	10.4

SECTOR 1

	CORNERING GRIP, G	EXIT SPEED, MPH	SECTOR TIME, SEC
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	1.06	73.3	8.1
KTM X-Bow	1.12	73.8	8.1
Chevrolet Corvette Grand Sport	0.98	71.7	8.4
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	0.98	74.1	8.5
Ariel Atom 3	1.03	73.6	8.6
Porsche Cayman S	0.99	69.9	8.7
Audi R8 5.2 FSI	0.94	71.8	8.8
Audi TTS	0.94	69.4	8.8
Chevrolet Camaro SS	0.90	65.4	8.8
Ford Mustang GT	0.93	66.2	8.8
Lotus Exige S 260 Sport	0.91	67.7	8.9
BMW M3	0.91	70.0	8.9
Jaguar XKR	0.84	68.5	9.0
Porsche 911 Carrera S	0.97	72.4	9.0
Audi S4	0.93	68.3	9.0
Hyundai Genesis Coupe 3.8	0.88	64.7	9.0
Mini Cooper John Cooper Works	0.84	60.6	9.0
Subaru Impreza WRX	0.87	62.7	9.0
Nissan NISMO 370Z	0.91	67.7	9.1
Volkswagen GTI	0.85	61.7	9.1
Ford Shelby GT500	0.85	64.7	9.2
Mazdaspeed 3	0.84	61.6	9.2



VIR OFFERS SIX DIFFERENT TRACK CONFIGURATIONS. WE CHOSE THE GRAND WEST COURSE FOR ITS MIX OF STRAIGHTS, SLOW AND HIGH-SPEED CORNERS, UPHILL ESSES, AND 4.1-MILE LENGTH.

THE (just) O.K. CO.

WE GALLOP THROUGH
BLUEGRASS COUNTRY,
EXERCISING EIGHT SUVs
THAT ARE NOT SO MUCH
QUARTER HORSES AS
MINIATURE PONIES.



by JOHN PHILLIPS
photography by MARC URBANO

DRR AL

LAST TIME WE WRUNG OUT THE AUTOMOTIVE GALAXY OF MINIATURE SUVs ["Mud Puppies," February 2008], we, uh, really had to wring them out. That's because we sank a couple of them and doused the rest in liquid clay, prompting outrage from off-road clubs, a few manufacturers, and the state of Michigan.

We resolved this time to avoid the primordial goo in favor of the genteel plantations and quarter-horse farms of Bluegrass Country, which offered the bonus of genuine BBQ joints. At one such eatery, in fact, the waitress eventually approached our table and made this startling announcement: "We are now officially *out of ribs*." Upon returning to the hotel that night, assistant tech editor K.C. Colwell complained, "Oh, man, I think I've got the meat sweats."

In truth, one doesn't associate raging carnivorousness with these docile vehicles, which Americans still view as SUVs but we regard as tall wagons. Why not a Camry wagon instead of a RAV4 or an Accord wagon instead of a CR-V? Whenever we've proffered that argument, however, we've been met with blank stares. So here we go again with the "mild horses," strong on practicality but mostly less fun than that pony your parents rented for your sixth birthday.



MERCURY MARINER

THE HIGHS> Pillowy ride, your best friend on the interstate, bargain price.

THE LOWS> Too much body roll, too little grip, feeling a bit dowdy.

THE VERDICT> Airy and honest but also in need of a wholesale freshening.



This time around, we've deleted the Jeep Liberty and the Nissan Rogue, which didn't win previously and are unchanged. We included no Hyundai because an all-new Tucson is looming but not yet available. And GM's envoy on this outing was the new GMC Terrain. To that mix we added a couple of turbocharged newcomers: VW's Tiguan and Subaru's recently updated Forester.

We opted for automatic transmissions, the highest-output engine, and all-wheel drive. Alas, we could locate only front-drive versions of the Terrain and the Tiguan. Sorry.

Given the insurance claims following our most recent mini-SUV test, we went to great pains this time to assure a damage-free outing. Did you know that horses enjoy eating side-view mirrors, windshield wipers, \$12,000 Nikon cameras, and paint right down to bare metal [see page 7]? Neither did we.

8. MERCURY MARINER

The optional V-6 in the Ford Escape and Mercury Mariner is now rated at 240 horsepower—a 40-horse increase—and the deservedly maligned four-speed automatic has been binned in favor of a modern six-speed. Also new are rearview mirrors with convex magnifiers in the outer corners, aimed at the driver's blind spots—quite useful as we reversed the





SUZUKI GRAND VITARA

THE HIGHS> Capable off-road, feels truckishly solid, pugnacious styling.

THE LOWS> Heavy, slow-witted, ought to offer more interior space.

THE VERDICT> A little SUV that will help you through your midlife crisis.



Mariner through a herd of unruly ponies.

This SUV finished last mostly because of its flaccid suspension. It scored the slowest lane-change speed and the second-worst skidpad grip—in fairness, both maneuvers were handicapped by overaggressive stability control—then went on to log the worst braking distance by quite a margin. The 16-inch tires may be complicit in this, as may be the Mariner's tallest-in-group status. The moment we reached the hills of West Virginia, the Mariner lived up to its seagoing moniker by rolling, tossing, and pitching—a pale-blue Dearborn trawler in a gale.

The other knock against the Mercury was that, at wide-open throttle, it made the most racket, and the quality of the racket was judged the most abrasive. On the upside, as one voter put it, "While the Honda struggles up grades with kickdowns and revs aplenty, the Mercury just chugs easily over hill and dale." We *do* wish the shifter's menu offered more than just "D" and "L," however.

Other pluses: The Mariner offers a simple center stack, great visibility—in part because of its razor-thin A-pillars—and a bargain-basement price. In this group, in fact, it carried an as-tested sticker \$1728 less than any other's. It also proved a poised, serene, stable interstate cruiser, with a plush ride and comfortable seats upholstered in grippy, classy-looking fabric. When we asked our voters which SUV they'd pick if they had to drive to L.A. tomorrow, two pointed fingers at the Mariner. "Of course, when I got there," added one, "I'd rent something that actually offered some fun."

7. SUZUKI GRAND VITARA

Just as the Mariner's V-6 enjoyed a colossal bump in power, so has the Suzuki's, rising from an anemic 185 horses to a that's-more-like-it 230. Unfortunately, the Grand Vitara remains porky, which might explain why it logged the second-slowest sprint to 60 mph, the second-worst quarter-mile ET, and—ahem—the worst observed fuel economy.

The Grand Vitara now comes with a standard nav system, which also is removable, meaning you can deploy it on hikes to previously undiscovered discount-liquor stores. The interior is otherwise somber and somewhat dated, enlivened only by a dark marble-look veneer that somehow recalls the Formica in the lobby of a '60s-era Vegas hotel.

All eight of our crack voters agreed that the Suzuki was the most trucklike of the assembled mini-utes, and it's probably no lie, given the integrated ladder frame in its unibody. The truckishness extends to an unyielding ride and actual off-road prowess, as demonstrated during our sodden 2008 soirée. In addition to short

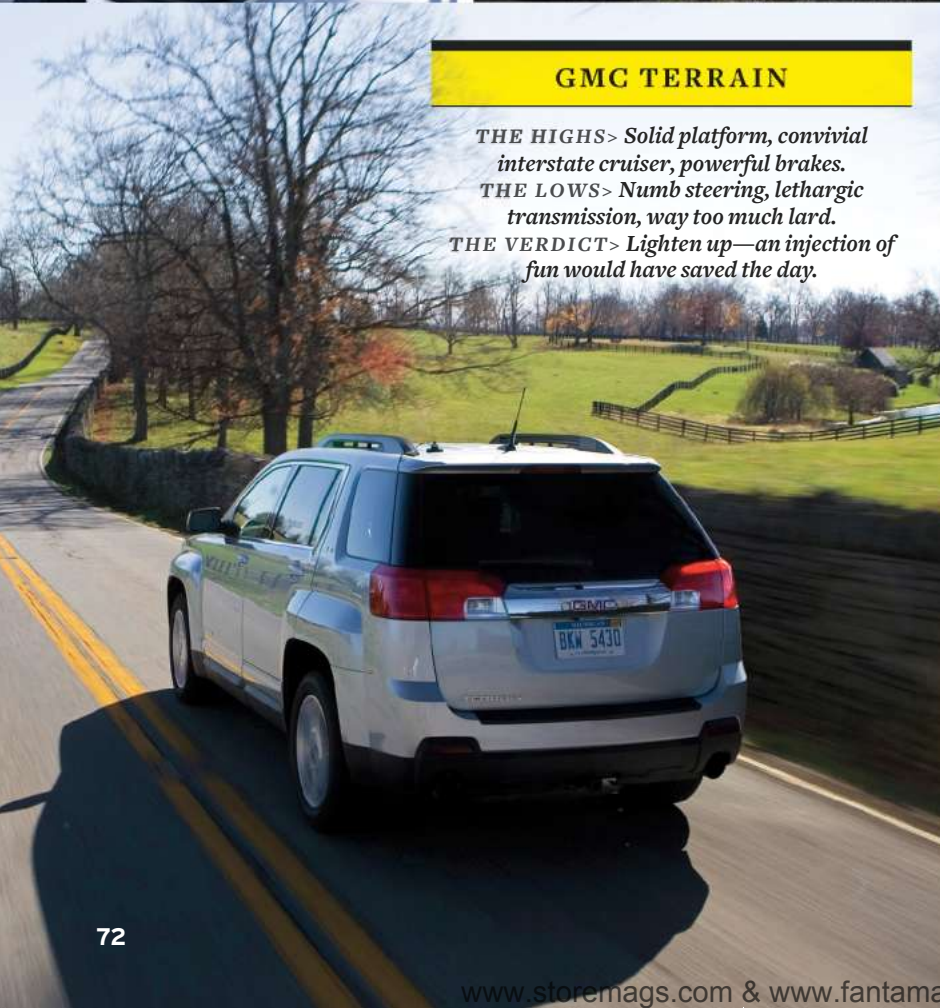


GMC TERRAIN

THE HIGHS> Solid platform, convivial interstate cruiser, powerful brakes.

THE LOWS> Numb steering, lethargic transmission, way too much lard.

THE VERDICT> Lighten up—an injection of fun would have saved the day.



overhangs, our tester's center diff could be locked in both four-wheel-drive high as well as low. Add to that hill-descent control, hill-hold control, and 7.9 inches of ground clearance, and you've got a feisty little mudder that can also be flat-towed by switching the transfer case into neutral.

Unfortunately, the Suzuki's bad-boy persona wears thin after a couple of hours. The steering is a tad heavy at low speeds, turn-in could be sharper, and the tall shifter requires Schwarzeneggian effort as it clunks through a maze of strangely arrayed detents.

Given all of this implied brutishness, you'd suppose the Grand Vitara is cavernous within. Nope. In fact, it is tied with the VW for least front interior volume, finished last for rear interior volume, and tied again with the little VW for least cubic feet of storage behind the rear seat.

"Unless you're off-roading," offered Colwell, "I don't see any interesting driving dynamics here." Maybe the Suzuki is aimed at ego-shaky males who can't abide a cute-ute grocery getter.

6. GMC TERRAIN

GMC's Terrain is the sister ship to the Chevy Equinox and, apart from styling, the two don't differ much. Which means we get to pick at a familiar scab. The Terrain is the longest SUV in this group and rides on a wheelbase that extends 7.4 inches beyond any competitor's, making it a Clydesdale among Shetland ponies. What should be a "mini" SUV weighs 4008 pounds—more than a quarter-ton heavier than, say, the Subaru Forester. And that's *with* out all-wheel drive. Even attached to a 264-horse V-6 (a \$1500 option), the Terrain consistently felt as if it wanted to saunter back to the barn and strap on the oat bag.

On West Virginia's narrow farm roads, the Terrain rarely felt fully connected to the tarmac and heaved about as if it might suddenly spill into the oncoming lane. That sapped driver confidence, which is a shame because the Terrain's skidpad grip—tied with the taut little CR-V's—proves it can cling with the best of them.

Several editors complained about the front seats, noting a short seat cushion that was oddly dished, encouraging slouching. This SUV also lost votes for its steering, which was light but lifeless on-center, requiring a major twirl to initiate any change in direction. Moreover, GM has formatted the six-speed automatic not for fun but for fuel economy. Unless your foot is more or less jamming the accelerator pedal clean through the fire wall, the transmission just relentlessly upshifts. The manu-

matic helps a little, but it's a strange, inch-long, thumb-actuated rocker on the side of the shift lever, sufficiently fiddly that you'll not often use it.

Not all is lost, however. The Terrain tracked like a champ. Its V-6 was quietest at idle. Its platform was solid and rattle-free. And, from 70 mph, it stopped in the shortest distance, a considerable feat given its mass.

Study the details—the cockpit's futuristic “floating” center stack and the contrasting red stitching, for instance—and you'll see that the new General Motors is now quite serious about small SUVs. But as one editor put it, “What we have here is a ‘professional grade’ Equinox—competent but not playful.”

5. MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER

Freshened for 2010, the Outlander GT's V-6 produces 10 more horses, fed via an outsized version of the Lancer Evo's grille, now evidently capable of sucking in leaves, roadkill, and possibly a stop sign or two. Ignore the steep base price; the Outlander comes equipped with so many standard amenities that it might require a three-page Monroney sticker.

This SUV essentially shares its platform with the Lancer sedan, and Mitsubishi's strategy was to make this a sporting proposition. On the skidpad, at least, the plan worked, with the Outlander logging best-in-class grip. In backwoods Bluegrass Country, however, it wasn't as engaging. Its heavy steering tended to load up abruptly even when the front tires hadn't. And there was a little too much body roll upon turn-in, causing this vehicle's considerable heft to shift to the outer front wheel.

Moreover, the secondary controls were difficult to learn. Fit and finish was mediocre, with gaps on the dash that varied wildly. And above 75 mph, the Mitsu whipped up a maelstrom of wind noise and tire thrum.

On the other hand, we loved the paddle shifters, which were big, easy to reach, and summoned gears with lightning speed. And between the front seats resides the “Super-All Wheel Control” knob that commands the center diff to apportion power front to back and side to side in three modes: “tarmac,” “snow,” and “lock.” Curiously, the lock mode is operable at all speeds.

We must also credit Mitsubishi for being amusing. First, the lower quarter of the Outlander's liftgate folds downward, creating a tailgate capable of accommodating 440 pounds of picnic. Second, a third-row seat is available. Well, “seat” isn't the right word. It's more like three pieces of rebar rattling inside a roll of felt, with flip-up headrests fashioned from Ping-Pong paddles. Wrote associate website editor



MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER

THE HIGHS > Features aplenty, fun paddle shifters, flexible tailgate.

THE LOWS > Bizarro third-row seat, mediocre fit and finish, heavy.

THE VERDICT > A cute ute that has yet to pin down its mission statement.



Jared Gall, “No child is going to be comfortable back there unless he’s unconscious.”

In the end, the Outlander is like a politician trying to be all things to all people. The message gets muddled.

4. SUBARU FORESTER

New for 2009, the Forester—the vehicle most likely to be parked in the lot of a Whole Foods store—is all grown up. It’s 2.9 inches longer and 1.8 inches wider, and it benefits from an extra 3.6 inches of wheelbase. Moreover, the less intrusive rear suspension allows the distance between the aft wheel wells to swell by 5.2 inches. In this group, the Subaru can thus carry the largest piece of plywood.

What the driver notices first about this soft-roader is its bright, open, airy cockpit. You sit bolt upright, amid vast expanses of unused headroom, and the huge windshield and backlight are a boon to sightlines. It’s a pleasant place to conduct business.

Subaru’s turbocharged and intercooled flat-four by no means produces the most power in this group, yet the Forester was the quickest to 30 mph and the second-quickest to 60 mph, in part because it weighed the least. Turbo lag is minimal, but you soon learn not to light-off that secondary oomph in the middle of a 90-degree turn, where it can upset the chassis and passengers alike. Another turbo side effect: Premium fuel is mandatory. Idle quality could be better, and, after long interstate slogs, the boxer can begin to drone.

This is the second 2.5XT we’ve tested that evinced crash-through sufficient to set various cockpit bits and subassemblies in motion. The ride isn’t harsh, but those distant ticks, rattles, and groans do not a good first impression make. And on the subject of rigidity, our man Gall noted, “You can even feel quick steering corrections ripple back through the structure.”

With the 2009 redesign, the five-speed manual is no longer available with the turbo, so your only option is a four-speed automatic, which seems unconscionable at this price. Yet there were no transmission diatribes in the Subie’s logbook. In fact, the manumatic proved quick and precise, and, as one voter put it, “In the hills, you can just leave it in third all day.”

Overall, this is a gratifying blend of agility, practicality, and performance. It’s interesting to note that before we calculated observed fuel economy, the Forester was in third place. Turbos can be thirsty.

3. HONDA CR-V

In our 2008 “Mud Puppies” comparo, the CR-V finished second to the RAV4, although it was a statistical dead heat: 208 points to the Honda’s





206. Back then, the CR-V's 2.4-liter inline-four—the only powerplant available then and now—produced only 166 horsepower. In the interim, Honda has located an extra 14 horses—mostly via a bump in compression—but that still leaves the CR-V 20 behind the next-weakest SUV here. The Honda was thus the slowest to 60 mph and was 1.8 seconds astern the RAV4 through the quarter-mile.

Even as its engine was huffing and puffing near its 7100-rpm redline, the CR-V nonetheless had little trouble pacing our group through the hills. For that, we can thank its taut chassis—unfazed by even the wildest back-holler whoop-de-dos—and its linear, communicative steering, which tells you all you need to know about road textures and grip. The CR-V can be placed confidently anywhere mid-turn, and nothing upsets it; witness its winning lane-change velocity.

We always think of the CR-V as an itty-bitty thing, but it approaches cavernous inside. It tied the RAV4 for greatest rear-seat comfort, in fact, and managed a three-way tie for the most cubic feet behind the rear seat.

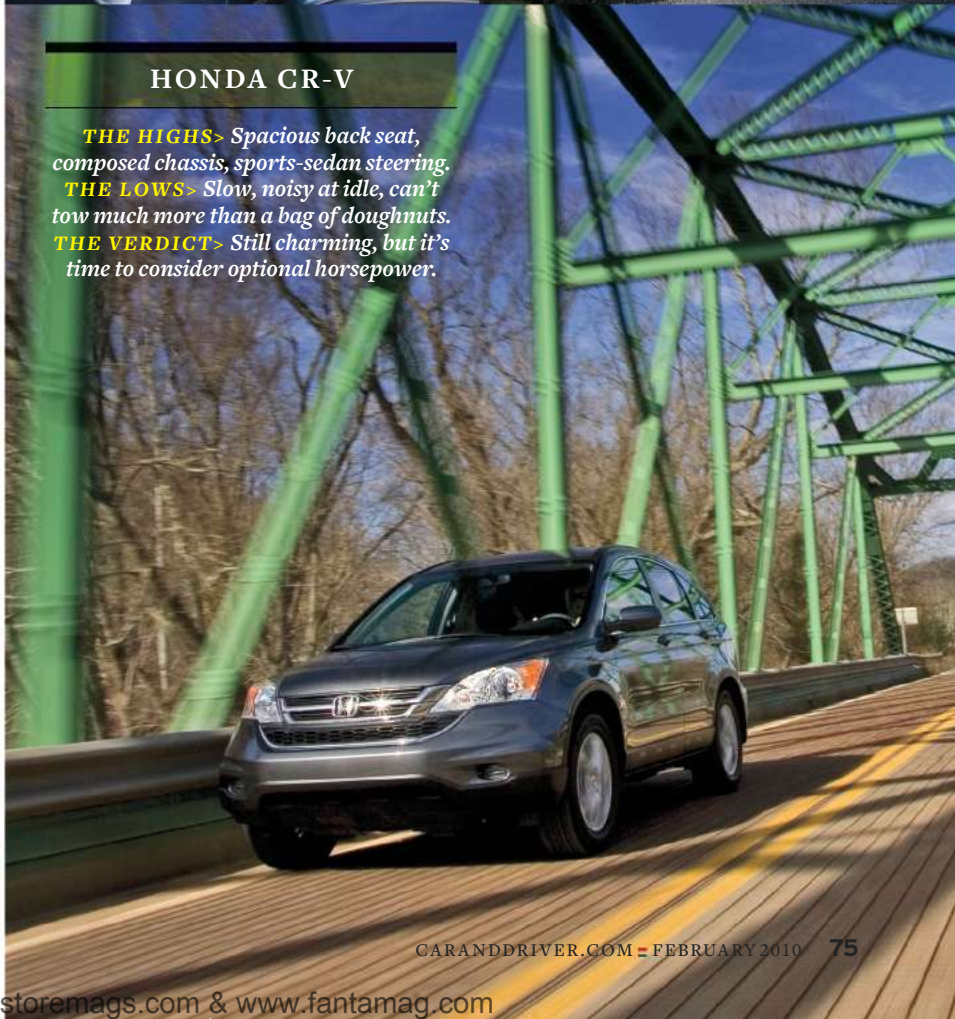
Honda has freshened the 2010 CR-V with a zillion small upgrades—folding armrests that are an inch wider, for example—but the car otherwise feels the same, notably in the richness of its interior surfaces and their tasteful

HONDA CR-V

THE HIGHS > Spacious back seat, composed chassis, sports-sedan steering.

THE LOWS > Slow, noisy at idle, can't tow much more than a bag of doughnuts.

THE VERDICT > Still charming, but it's time to consider optional horsepower.



MINI SUVs

	GMC Terrain SLE	Honda CR-V EX-L 4WD	Mercury Mariner V-6 AWD	Mitsubishi Outlander GT S-AWC
VEHICLE				
PRICE BASE >	\$24,995	\$28,455	\$25,545	\$29,990
PRICE AS TESTED >	\$29,930	\$30,455	\$26,545	\$32,990
DIMENSIONS				
LENGTH >	185.2 inches	179.3 inches	175.1 inches	183.7 inches
WIDTH >	72.8 inches	71.6 inches	71.1 inches	70.9 inches
HEIGHT >	66.3 inches	66.1 inches	67.9 inches	66.1 inches
WHEELBASE >	112.5 inches	103.1 inches	103.1 inches	105.1 inches
FRONT TRACK >	62.9 inches	61.6 inches	60.7 inches	60.6 inches
REAR TRACK >	62.1 inches	61.6 inches	60.2 inches	60.6 inches
INTERIOR VOLUME >	F: 54 cubic feet R: 50 cubic feet	F: 53 cubic feet R: 48 cubic feet	F: 55 cubic feet R: 44 cubic feet	F: 54 cubic feet R: 45 cubic feet
WEIGHT				
CURB >	4008 pounds	3559 pounds	3575 pounds	3866 pounds
% FRONT/% REAR >	57.7/42.3	57.5/42.5	59.6/40.4	55.4/44.6
TOWING				
MAX >	3500 pounds	1500 pounds	3500 pounds	3500 pounds
AS TESTED >	3500 pounds	1500 pounds	1500 pounds	3500 pounds
FUEL				
TANK >	20.9 gallons	15.3 gallons	16.5 gallons	15.9 gallons
FUEL RATING >	87 octane	87 octane	87 octane	91 octane
EPA CITY >	17 mpg	21 mpg	18 mpg	18 mpg
EPA HWY >	25 mpg	27 mpg	23 mpg	24 mpg
C/D 1050-MILE TRIP >	21 mpg	24 mpg	22 mpg	22 mpg
POWERTRAIN				
ENGINE >	DOHC 16-valve V-6 183 cu in (2997cc)	DOHC 16-valve inline-4 144 cu in (2354cc)	DOHC 24-valve V-6 181 cu in (2967cc)	SOHC 24-valve V-6 183 cu in (2998cc)
POWER BHP @ RPM >	264 @ 6950	180 @ 6800	240 @ 6550	230 @ 6250
TORQUE LB-FT @ RPM >	222 @ 5100	161 @ 4400	233 @ 4300	215 @ 3750
REDLINE >	7200 rpm	7100 rpm	6900 rpm	6500 rpm
LB PER BHP >	15.2	19.8	14.9	16.8
DRIVELINE				
TRANSMISSION >	6-speed automatic front	5-speed automatic all	6-speed automatic all	6-speed automatic all
DRIVEN WHEELS >	front	all	all	all
GEAR RATIO:1/MPH PER 1000 RPM >	1 4.48/6.5 2 2.87/10.2 3 1.84/15.9 4 1.41/20.8 5 1.00/29.3 6 0.74/39.6	1 2.79/6.5 2 1.61/11.3 3 1.08/16.9 4 0.77/23.6 5 0.57/32.2	1 4.58/5.2 2 2.96/8.0 3 1.91/12.5 4 1.45/16.5 5 1.00/23.0 6 0.75/31.9	1 4.20/5.3 2 2.41/9.3 3 1.58/14.2 4 1.16/19.9 5 0.86/26.3 6 0.69/32.8
AXLE RATIO:1 >	2.77	4.50	3.51	3.57
CHASSIS				
SUSPENSION >	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
BRAKES >	F: 12.6-inch vented disc R: 11.9-inch vented disc	F: 11.7-inch vented disc R: 12.0-inch disc	F: 11.9-inch vented disc R: 10.0-inch drum	F: 11.6-inch vented disc R: 11.9-inch disc
ANTI-LOCK CONTROL >	yes	yes	yes	yes
STABILITY CONTROL >	yes	yes	yes	yes
TIRES >	Michelin Latitude Tour, P235/55R-18 99T M+S	Bridgestone Dueler H/L 400, 225/65R-17 102T M+S	Michelin Latitude Tour, P235/70R-16 104T M+S	Goodyear Eagle LS2, P225/55R-18 97H M+S
STORAGE				
CARGO BEHIND >	F: 64 cubic feet R: 32 cubic feet	F: 73 cubic feet R: 36 cubic feet	F: 67 cubic feet R: 31 cubic feet	F: 73 cubic feet R: 36 cubic feet
BEER CASES: SEATS UP/FOLDED >	19/38	19/35	17/40	19/39
LENGTH OF PIPE >	133.0 inches	124.0 inches	124.0 inches	130.5 inches
SHEET OF PLYWOOD: LENGTH X WIDTH >	68.3 x 37.0 inches	54.0 x 38.0 inches	65.8 x 41.0 inches	68.3 x 40.5 inches
C/D TEST RESULTS				
ACCELERATION				
0-30 MPH >	3.0 sec	3.1 sec	2.5 sec	2.5 sec
0-60 MPH >	7.5 sec	8.7 sec	7.2 sec	7.1 sec
0-100 MPH >	20.3 sec	26.1 sec	19.6 sec	20.0 sec
1/4 MILE @ MPH >	15.9 sec @ 89	16.7 sec @ 84	15.5 sec @ 90	15.6 sec @ 90
ROLLING 5-60 >	7.8 sec	9.4 sec	7.6 sec	7.7 sec
TOP GEAR 30-50 >	3.8 sec	5.2 mph	3.9 sec	4.1 sec
TOP GEAR 50-70 >	4.9 sec	6.2 sec	5.0 sec	5.7 sec
TOP SPEED >	120 mph (gov ltd)	117 mph (gov ltd)	103 mph (gov ltd)	125 mph (gov ltd)
CHASSIS				
BRAKING 70-0 MPH >	161 feet	172 feet	196 feet	178 feet
ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD >				
LANE CHANGE >	0.78 g	0.78 g	0.69 g†	0.80 g
LANE CHANGE >	58.4 mph	60.5 mph	50.7 mph†	58.9 mph
SOUND LEVEL				
IDLE >	38 dBA	43 dBA	40 dBA	41 dBA
FULL THROTTLE >	76 dBA	76 dBA	78 dBA	75 dBA
70-MPH CRUISE >	72 dBA	71 dBA	72 dBA	72 dBA
   				

VEHICLE	Subaru Forester 2.5XT Limited	Suzuki Grand Vitara V-6 Limited 4WD	Toyota RAV4 Limited 4x4	Volkswagen Tiguan SE
PRICE BASE >	\$29,190	\$27,879	\$28,610	\$27,950
PRICE AS TESTED >	\$32,197	\$28,273	\$31,774	\$29,699
DIMENSIONS				
LENGTH >	179.5 inches	177.2 inches	181.9 inches	174.3 inches
WIDTH >	70.1 inches	71.3 inches	73.0 inches	71.2 inches
HEIGHT >	66.9 inches	66.7 inches	66.3 inches	66.3 inches
WHEELBASE >	103.0 inches	103.9 inches	104.7 inches	102.5 inches
FRONT TRACK >	60.2 inches	60.6 inches	61.4 inches	61.8 inches
REAR TRACK >	60.2 inches	61.4 inches	61.4 inches	61.9 inches
INTERIOR VOLUME >	F: 56 cubic feet R: 46 cubic feet	F: 51 cubic feet R: 43 cubic feet	F: 55 cubic feet R: 49 cubic feet	F: 51 cubic feet R: 44 cubic feet
WEIGHT				
CURB >	3433 pounds	3922 pounds	3751 pounds	3547 pounds
% FRONT/% REAR >	56.1/43.9	52.1/47.9	58.4/41.6	58.4/41.6
TOWING				
MAX >	2400 pounds	3000 pounds	3500 pounds	2200 pounds
AS TESTED >	2400 pounds	3000 pounds	3500 pounds	2200 pounds
FUEL				
TANK >	16.9 gallons	17.4 gallons	15.9 gallons	16.8 gallons
FUEL RATING >	91 octane	87 octane	87 octane	91 octane
EPA CITY >	19 mpg	17 mpg	19 mpg	18 mpg
EPA HWY >	24 mpg	23 mpg	26 mpg	24 mpg
C/D 1050-MILE TRIP >	21 mpg	20 mpg	24 mpg	24 mpg
POWERTRAIN				
ENGINE >	turbocharged DOHC 16-valve flat-4 150 cu in (2457cc)	DOHC 24-valve V-6 195 cu in (3195cc)	DOHC 24-valve V-6 211 cu in (3456cc)	turbocharged DOHC 16-valve inline-4 121 cu in (1984cc)
POWER BHP @ RPM >	224 @ 5200	230 @ 6200	269 @ 6200	200 @ 5100
TORQUE LB-FT @ RPM >	226 @ 2800	213 @ 3500	246 @ 4700	207 @ 1700
REDLINE >	6600 rpm	6500 rpm	6400 rpm	6500 rpm
LB PER BHP >	15.3	17.1	13.9	17.7
DRIVELINE				
TRANSMISSION >	4-speed automatic	5-speed automatic	5-speed automatic	6-speed automatic
DRIVEN WHEELS >	all	all	all	front
GEAR RATIO:1/MPH PER 1000 RPM >	1 2.79/6.3 2 1.55/11.3 3 1.00/17.4 4 0.69/25.1	1 3.52/6.5 2 2.04/11.2 3 1.40/16.4 4 1.00/22.9 5 0.72/32.0	1 4.24/6.3 2 2.36/11.3 3 1.52/17.6 4 1.05/25.5 5 0.76/35.3	1 3.95/5.4 2 2.30/9.2 3 1.56/13.6 4 1.16/18.3 5 0.86/24.7 6 0.69/30.8
AXLE RATIO:1 >	4.44	3.58	3.08	3.69
CHASSIS				
SUSPENSION >	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar R: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
BRAKES >	F: 11.7-inch vented disc R: 11.3-inch disc	F: 11.5-inch vented disc R: 12.1-inch vented disc	F: 11.8-inch vented disc R: 11.2-inch disc	F: 12.3-inch vented disc R: 11.3-inch disc
ANTI-LOCK CONTROL >	yes	yes	yes	yes
STABILITY CONTROL >	yes	yes	yes	yes
TIRES >	Yokohama Geolandar G95, P225/55R-17 95H M+S	Dunlop AT20 Grandtrek, P225/60R-18 99H M+S	Toyo A20 Open Country, 225/65R-17 101H M+S	Michelin Latitude Tour HP, 235/55R-17 99H M+S
STORAGE				
CARGO BEHIND >	F: 63 cubic feet R: 31 cubic feet	F: 67 cubic feet R: 24 cubic feet	F: 73 cubic feet R: 36 cubic feet	F: 56 cubic feet R: 24 cubic feet
BEER CASES: SEATS UP/FOLDED >	18/38	17/35	19/41	11/33
LENGTH OF PIPE >	126.5 inches	123.0 inches	128.5 inches	125.5 inches
SHEET OF PLYWOOD: LENGTH X WIDTH >	70.0 x 42.3 inches	61.0 x 40.5 inches	68.0 x 42.5 inches	65.0 x 39.8 inches
C/D TEST RESULTS				
ACCELERATION				
0-30 MPH >	2.2 sec	3.0 sec	2.3 sec	2.7 sec
0-60 MPH >	6.7 sec	8.4 sec	6.4 sec	7.1 sec
0-100 MPH >	18.6 sec	23.4 sec	17.0 sec	19.6 sec
1/4 MILE @ MPH >	15.1 sec @ 91	16.5 sec @ 85	14.9 sec @ 94	15.5 sec @ 91
ROLLING 5-60 >	7.2 sec	9.0 sec	6.9 sec	7.6 sec
TOP GEAR 30-50 >	4.2 sec	4.5 mph	3.8 sec	3.7 sec
TOP GEAR 50-70 >	4.9 sec	5.6 sec	4.3 sec	5.0 sec
TOP SPEED >	128 mph (gov ltd)	126 mph (drag ltd)	136 mph (gov ltd)	121 mph (gov ltd)
CHASSIS				
BRAKING 70-0 MPH >	169 feet	183 feet	183 feet	175 feet
ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD >	0.77 g†	0.68 g†	0.75 g	0.79 g
LANE CHANGE >	57.6 mph†	57.9 mph†	58.9 mph	59.3 mph
SOUND LEVEL				
IDLE >	41 dBA	42 dBA	40 dBA	44 dBA
FULL THROTTLE >	76 dBA	77 dBA	77 dBA	75 dBA
70-MPH CRUISE >	72 dBA	72 dBA	72 dBA	73 dBA



†Stability-control-inhibited.



MINI SUVS

detailing. When you have the bestselling SUV in America, you fear making big changes.

We'd nonetheless suggest one: optional turbochargers or a V-6. If Toyota can do it for as little as \$28,610, Honda can, too. A V-6 may help boost towing capacity—as it is, the existing CR-V can pull only a wimpy 1500 pounds. More important, this four-banger, dare we say it, is feeling a little wheezy. At idle, it proved lumpy and noisy, with an abrupt clunk every time the A/C compressor kicked on and off.

Mini-ute buyers claim to worship at the altar of fuel economy. Yeah? Then contemplate this: Over 1050 miles of Joie Chitwood-style driving, the RAV4 V-6 delivered an observed 24 mpg. The CR-V? The same.

2. VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN

You don't expect much personality in the cute-ute niche, but VW's Tiguan is a raucous little delinquent, sort of like Mike Tyson at a sorority slumber party. Our voters alternately called it "the Tiggie," "the Tigster," "the Tiglet," and, in one case, "Fred," although that was the work of contributing editor Fred M.H. Gregory.

Here's what the Tiguan is: a GTI on stilts. No surprise, then, that it earned best-handling

VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN

THE HIGHS> Steering, brakes, and chassis that are all magic in the hills.

THE LOWS> Cramped rear seat, slim cargo space, needs a DSG transmission.

THE VERDICT> Almost as fun as a five-door GTI but not a lot more practical.



TOYOTA RAV4

THE HIGHS> Serene, carlike, solid, zero to 60 in 6.4 seconds.

THE LOWS> A couple of cheap interior surfaces, pricey in Limited trim.

THE VERDICT> Who will dethrone the two-time champ? Anybody?



status, backed up by the surest brake feel and perfectly weighted, accurate steering. Part of its goat-like nimbleness can be attributed to its diminutive dimensions. The Volkswagen is the shortest overall in this herd, riding on the least wheelbase. Sort of a rolling square. Keep in mind, however, that if this had been a 4MOTION model (starting at \$27,050), some of that agility would have gone missing.

The dimensions, alas, intrude upon the gorgeous cockpit, which was voted the classiest of the bunch. The Tiguan's back seat was cramped for three riders, aggravated by space-wasting plastic bins at either end of the cushion and a center console that crowded the hump rider's knees. Consider this a four-passenger machine. What's more, the Tig can carry the fewest cases of beer and the shortest length of pipe.

This VW might have given the Toyota a stronger run for its money but for a pair of faults. First, its turbocharged inline-four is strangely noisy—the Tiguan was loudest at a 70-mph cruise and at idle. Second, in straight-forward “D” mode, the automatic transmission proved dimwitted—agonizingly slow to kick down, agonizingly quick to grab fifth or sixth. The cure was to leave it permanently in sport mode, which responds smartly when it sees rapid throttle inputs. Or you can bang away at



the Tiptronic in its separate shift gate. But, hey, why not give us a DSG?

"I like this thing," said editor-in-chief Eddie Alterman, "but it always makes me ask, 'Wouldn't a five-door GTI or a Jetta Sport-Wagen be more satisfying when we're talking front-drivers?'"

1. TOYOTA RAV4

In 2008, a four-cylinder RAV4 defeated all of its closest competitors. Twenty-four months later, a six-cylinder RAV4 repeats the feat. By day two of our four-day drive, no one knew which vehicles would finish in second through eighth places. Yet everyone knew where the Toyota would finish.

Despite its size, what the RAV4 does best is drive like a car, and nearly like a sports sedan, in fact. Its platform is shared with no other vehicle, so it's not too surprising that every component feels custom-built and perfectly integrated, as if the engineers who designed the drivetrain talked to the engineers who tuned the chassis who talked to the engineers who dialed in the steering who talked to the engineers who calibrated the brakes.

Fitted with the most-powerful-in-class V-6, the RAV4 is the quickest to 60 mph, is the fleetest through the quarter-mile, and offers the greatest top speed. Yet it is also the smoothest of the bunch and—this is the incredible part—managed to tie the Honda's little four-banger for best observed fuel economy despite having two more cylinders.

And the kudos for this compact SUV didn't stop there. The Toyota's transmission was deemed the slickest, never drawing attention to itself. The chassis imposes disciplined body motions on the vehicle while simultaneously delivering a ride as plush as the Mariner's. The RAV4 tied the CR-V for greatest rear-seat comfort. At idle, the V-6 proved so velvety that several of us tried to start an already running vehicle. And if you're in the habit of carrying multiple cases of beer—who isn't?—the Toyota's cargo bay will swallow the most.

Complaints were few. The headliner is cheesy, and the plastic-clad A-pillars need to be covered in fabric. The black cargo tonneau cover is fiddly and appears to have been made from a Glad garbage bag. And the base of the shifter travels through a flimsy plastic sliding panel, when a traditional boot would have been friction-free and easier on the eyes.

Otherwise, this Toyota is good-looking, reliable, well-built, and enjoyable—what most of us seek in a spouse. At the Tokyo motor show, Akio Toyoda said of his company's cars, "We've got to make them fun." He won't have to work too hard on this one. ■

FINAL RESULTS

RANK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Maximum points available	Toyota RAV4	Volkswagen Tiguan	Honda CR-V	Mitsubishi Outlander	Suzuki Grand Vitara	GMC Terrain	Mercury Mariner
VEHICLE								
DRIVER COMFORT	10	8	8	7	8	6	6	7
ERGONOMICS	10	8	8	8	8	6	7	7
REAR-SEAT COMFORT	5	5	3	5	4	4	4	4
REAR-SEAT SPACE*	5	5	3	4	4	3	3	3
CARGO SPACE*	5	5	1	5	3	5	1	3
TOWING CAPACITY*	5	5	4	3	4	5	5	3
FEATURES/AMENITIES*	10	9	7	8	8	10	7	1
FIT AND FINISH	10	9	9	9	8	6	7	6
INTERIOR STYLING	10	8	9	8	8	7	6	6
EXTERIOR STYLING	10	8	8	6	7	7	7	5
REBATES/EXTRAS*	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
AS-TESTED PRICE*	20	16	18	17	16	15	19	20
SUBTOTAL	105	87	78	80	78	74	72	65
POWERTRAIN								
1/4-MI ACCELERATION*	20	20	17	11	19	17	15	17
FLEXIBILITY*	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
FUEL ECONOMY*	10	10	10	7	8	7	6	8
ENGINE NVH	10	9	8	7	7	7	7	6
TRANSMISSION	10	8	7	7	7	7	6	6
SUBTOTAL	55	51	46	38	44	43	39	41
CHASSIS								
PERFORMANCE*	20	16	18	19	18	18	14	11
STEERING FEEL	10	8	9	8	7	6	6	5
BRAKE FEEL	10	7	8	7	7	7	6	6
HANDLING	10	8	9	8	7	7	6	5
RIDE	10	9	8	8	7	7	5	8
SUBTOTAL	60	48	52	50	46	45	37	35
EXPERIENCE								
FUN TO DRIVE	25	18	18	17	16	14	13	11
GRAND TOTAL	245	204	194	185	184	176	161	152

LAST MAN STANDING: Toyota's RAV4 is to mini-utes what Honda's Accord is to mid-size sedans and what BMW's 3-series is to sports sedans—the graceful, unified, predictable outcome of painstaking engineering. That it is a rocket to 60 mph is an unexpected perk, especially in this niche.



*These objective scores are calculated from the vehicles' dimensions, capacities, rebates and extras, and/or test results.

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P245/70 R-17	121

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P255/70 R-18	128
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265/65 R-18	153

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P275/60 R-20	176

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255/45 R-18	150
225/40 R-19	159
225/40 R-19	169

245/45 R-19	\$214
275/35 R-19	188
275/35 R-19	128
RFT (Runflat)	
225/55 R-16	\$139
225/45 R-17	189

245/60 R-17	\$211
245/45 R-18	247
P245/60 R-20	241
255/40 R-20	358
265/35 R-20	394

Blizzak LM-25 4X4

255/60 R-17	\$175
275/55 R-17	189
235/60 R-18	147
265/55 R-18	169

285/45 R-19	\$209
275/45 R-20	189
RFT (Runflat)	
265/55 R-18	\$268

255/65 R-18	\$187
255/50 R-19	339

Blizzak LM-60

215/45 R-17	\$144
225/45 R-17	150
235/45 R-17	160
235/50 R-17	168
215/45 R-18	177
225/40 R-18	172
225/45 R-18	184
P225/60 R-18	182
235/45 R-18	188
245/40 R-19	199
245/45 R-18	199
255/40 R-18	210

255/45 R-18	\$205
265/35 R-18	234
275/35 R-18	234
225/40 R-19	215
225/45 R-19	205
235/35 R-19	243
RFT (Runflat)	
245/45 R-19	223
255/35 R-19	264
255/40 R-19	211
255/50 R-18	228
265/35 R-19	265
275/35 R-19	276

245/40 R-20	\$272
245/45 R-20	260
P245/50 R-20	247
255/35 R-20	293
255/45 R-20	269
195/55 R-16	\$138
205/45 R-17	158
215/60 R-17	107
215/65 R-18	107
225/60 R-18	112
255/55 R-18	254

Blizzak WS60

175/65 R-14	\$75
185/60 R-14	74
185/65 R-14	77
185/70 R-14	73
195/60 R-14	77
175/65 R-15	73
195/55 R-15	90
195/60 R-15	81
195/65 R-15	82
205/60 R-15	85
205/70 R-15	82

215/60 R-15	\$87
215/65 R-15	88
215/70 R-15	85
195/60 R-16	85
205/55 R-16	107
205/60 R-16	90
205/65 R-16	92
215/65 R-16	93
225/60 R-16	119
235/60 R-16	106
235/65 R-16	105

205/60 R-17	\$133
215/45 R-17	127
215/60 R-17	126
215/65 R-17	107
P215/65 R-17	101
225/45 R-17	137
235/45 R-17	152
235/50 R-17	112
235/40 R-18	162

Blizzak LM-50 RFT (Runflat)

225/60 R-17	\$123
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Blizzak MZ-03 RFT (Runflat)

165/65 R-14	\$70
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Blizzak MZ-03 RFT (Runflat)

245/40 R-18	\$207
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Blizzak W965

215/85 R-16	\$136
245/75 R-16	145

Blizzak MZ-03 RFT (Runflat)

245/70 R-17	\$157
245/70 R-17	168



Graspic DS-3

175/70 R-13	\$57
175/70 R-14	65
185/60 R-14	65
185/65 R-14	68
185/70 R-14	64
195/70 R-14	66
195/70 R-15	70
185/65 R-15	68
195/65 R-15	81
195/60 R-15	72
195/65 R-15	73

205/60 R-15	\$75
205/65 R-15	77
205/70 R-15	73
215/65 R-15	79
215/70 R-15	76
205/55 R-16	96
205/60 R-16	93
215/55 R-16	98
215/60 R-16	84
215/65 R-16	84
225/55 R-16	102

225/60 R-16	\$90
215/45 R-17	114
215/50 R-17	121
215/55 R-17	103
215/60 R-17	96
225/45 R-17	123
225/50 R-17	107
235/45 R-17	136
225/60 R-18	179
225/65 R-18	173

SP Winter Sport

235/55 R-17	\$175
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SP Winter Sport 3D

195/65 R-15	\$96
205/65 R-15	90
205/55 R-16	98
205/65 R-16	108
215/55 R-16	119
215/65 R-16	116
225/55 R-16	124
235/60 R-16	121
205/50 R-17	136
215/55 R-17	149
225/45 R-17	147

225/45 R-17	\$149
225/55 R-17	152
235/45 R-17	157
235/55 R-17	141
245/40 R-17	181
245/45 R-17	166
255/45 R-17	195
235/60 R-18	179
235/40 R-18	199
235/40 R-18	203
235/50 R-18	231

235/60 R-18	\$175
245/40 R-18	219
255/45 R-18	240
265/35 R-18	256
285/35 R-18	277
ROF (RunOnFlat)	
245/40 R-18	\$118
245/50 R-18	299
245/45 R-19	275

SP Winter Sport M3

225/60 R-15	\$112
205/45 R-16	124
215/60 R-16	105
225/50 R-16	129
225/60 R-16	116

215/45 R-17	\$137
215/50 R-17	140
235/45 R-18	206
245/45 R-18	224
245/50 R-18	197

205/55 R-16	\$138
225/50 R-17	205

Grandtrek WT M3 (RunOnFlat)

255/55 R-18	\$298
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Grandtrek WT M3

255/50 R-19	\$203
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Grandtrek SJ6

30X3.5 R-15	\$99
205/70 R-16	91

Grandtrek SJ5

275/60 R-18	\$171
P265/50 R-20	112



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215/65 R-16	\$96
215/70 R-16	97
225/70 R-16	110
233/70 R-16	107
245/70 R-16	112
235/60 R-17	143
235/65 R-17	131
235/65 R-17	155
245/65 R-17	152
255/65 R-17	147
265/65 R-17	164
275/65 R-17	173
235/55 R-18	146

235/60 R-18	\$161
245/55 R-18	169
235/65 R-18	173
255/60 R-18	176
255/60 R-19	189
255/50 R-19	217
255/50 R-19	195
265/55 R-19	235
275/45 R-19	212
285/45 R-19	223
245/45 R-20	235
255/45 R-20	243

255/50 R-20	\$267
265/45 R-20	247
275/40 R-20	265
275/45 R-20	282
275/50 R-20	281
295/40 R-20	285
295/35 R-21	298
P275/45 R-22	344
RFT (Runflat)	
255/55 R-18	\$203
255/50 R-19	252

Winter 190 Snowcontrol

165/65 R-13	\$52
175/65 R-15	61

145/65 R-15	\$77
155/60 R-15	73

Winter 190 Snowcontrol Serie II

185/60 R-15	\$66
185/65 R-15	70

195/60 R-15	\$75
195/65 R-15	67

205/55 R-16	\$113
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Winter 190 SnowSport

185/55 R-15	\$92
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Winter 240 SnowSport

205/45 R-17	\$165
215/40 R-17	237
225/40 R-18	214

235/40 R-18	\$210
235/45 R-18	218
265/35 R-18	274

265/40 R-18	\$267
RFT (Runflat)	
205/45 R-17	\$179

Winter 210 Sottozero

225/55 R-16	\$147
215/60 R-17	178
235/55 R-17	171

225/65 R-18	\$177
225/60 R-18	159

RFT (Runflat)	
205/50 R-17	\$181
225/45 R-17	212
225/50 R-17	202

Winter 240 Sottozero

225/55 R-17	\$201
235/45 R-17	199
215/45 R-18	204
225/45 R-18	216
225/45 R-18	222
235/45 R-18	244
235/50 R-18	255

245/40 R-18	\$239
245/45 R-18	255
255/35 R-18	229
255/40 R-18	350
255/45 R-18	322
255/40 R-18	333
255/35 R-18	326

285/40 R-19	\$361
265/35 R-20	432
245/45 R-17	\$222
245/40 R-18	269
255/35 R-18	326

Winter 210 Sottozero Serie II

215/45 R-17	\$17
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Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$144



'10 Volvo S40 T5 R-Design FWD
16x6.5 MSW Type 15
205/55-16 Dunlop SP Winter Sport 3D
Total Package Price: \$768
Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$236



'10 Ford Taurus SE
17x7.5 Sport Edition A7
235/60-17 Bridgestone Blizzak WS60
Total Package Price: \$908
Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$288



'10 Chevrolet Camaro SS
18x8 moda EB1
245/55-18 Pirelli Scorpion Ice & Snow
Total Package Price: \$1,216
Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$248



'09 Subaru Forester 2.5 XT Limited
16x7 Sport Edition F10
205/65-16 Bridgestone Blizzak WS60
Total Package Price: \$752
Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$128



'10 GMC Sierra 1500 2WD Extended Cab
17x8 Sport Edition TK1
245/70-17 Continental ExtremeWinterContact
Total Package Price: \$1,068
Optional Set of TPMS Sensors: \$136

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SHOOTING

LONG-TERM TEST

STAR

by MARK GILLIES





2008 BMW M3: THE PERFECT SPORTS COUPE?

A car has got to be pretty spectacular to win over the curmudgeons here at 1585 Eisenhower Place, especially when familiarity sets in over the course of 40,000 miles. But our Sparkling Graphite Metallic M3 did indeed win us over. For less than \$70,000, the M3 bolts from a standstill to 60 mph in 4.3 seconds and turns the quarter-mile in 12.7 seconds at 113 mph. It pulls an exceptional 0.96 g on the skidpad, stops in 147 feet from 70 mph, and reaches a governor-restricted 161 mph. On a racetrack or a back road, it's a beautifully balanced and hugely entertaining machine.

Aside from performance, the M3 is comfortable on the highway and has plenty of space for four adults. It has a full complement of luxury accouterments and yet is very practical—even the trunk is commodious. It has muscular, raked looks and a



RANTS AND RAVES

K.C. COLWELL

This is the finest car on the market, period.

RUSS FERGUSON

The slow-speed launch can really suck. One auto-shop teacher accelerated very gingerly and got the M3 to buck and hitch like a 16-year-old learning to drive a manual.

DAVE VANDERWERP

I've long said that the Ferrari F430 is my favorite car, but after 13 days in the M3, I'm not sure the Ferrari is any better at delivering driving thrills—even without any “for the price” caveats.

SARA QUIROGA

My only complaint about this car is that I don't own it.

MIKE DUSHANE

The dual-clutch transmission short-shifts at the slightest hint of wheelspin in automatic mode. Very annoying. I wind up driving in manual mode all the time, so why not save money and get the manual?

STEVE SPENCE

Very grouchy sometimes in responses to the throttle. And that's about the only negative to this great, great car.

TONY QUIROGA

The M3 didn't work very well in deep snow—and the winter tires did little to help. But in snow less deep, the M3 tracked beautifully and worked remarkably well.



The interior held up well, but the side of the driver's seat got scuffed up. Rear-seat space was decent.



Spot the missing iDrive knob . . .

handsomely dark interior. A bonus is that regular service doesn't cost a cent, thanks to BMW's full-maintenance program, which lasts for four years or 50,000 miles. (The gas bill, however, wasn't cause to rejoice, given this BMW's 17-mpg thirst.)

When it came to ordering the car, we went with the so-called M double-clutch transmission (MDCT), a \$2700 option that replaces the standard six-speed manual with a seven-speed dual-clutch unit, BMW's first. We were eager to try this setup because dual-clutch transmissions promise the smoothness of an automatic when the driver can't be bothered to change gears, as well as superfast paddle shifts in manual mode. In the previous M3 (E46), BMW offered a single-clutch, automated manual gearbox that was notable for its harshness in manual mode and its clunkiness as an automatic.

Other options included the \$750 Cold-Weather package, a godsend in Michigan winters; the \$3250 Technology package that dumps navigation in with electronic adaptive dampers; 19-inch wheels and tires (\$1200); and the \$1900 Premium package that bundles power folding mirrors and Bluetooth interface along with upgraded leather interior trim that has a distinctive carbon-fiber look.

Who wouldn't react favorably to a performance car so well rounded? Here's who: some whiners on staff anxious to get past the 1200-mile engine-break-in period, during which

BMW suggests that drivers never use full throttle and refrain from revving higher than 5500 rpm. Once past this period, our crew was fulsome in its praise for the BMW's everyday drivability—although it pays to keep the variable shocks on their softest setting on poor pavement. We even noted relatively few iDrive complaints, at least until the knob that controls it became loose at 37,000 miles. (It was replaced under warranty, without charge.) BMW has since changed the iDrive interface, and the new setup is far easier to operate. Those who plugged iPods into the M3 were satisfied with the interface between tunes and car.

We always plan for snow in the winter, so at 19,903 miles, we installed a set of Pirelli Winter 240 Sottozero tires on the base 18-inch rims. We racked up 10,500 miles on these tires, during which the M3 proved quite adept at getting around despite all the white stuff that fell in Michigan last winter and spring. The car also rode better on the 18s, although most drivers felt the decrease in ride quality with the 19-inch wheels was worth it for the improved looks.

The service history was fairly uncomplicated, and with the free regular maintenance, the only out-of-pocket cost for 40,000 miles was \$1450 for new tires. Based on our experience, the stock Michelin Pilot Sport PS2s should last roughly 25,000 miles for the rears and 35,000 for the fronts. As for service, after an initial 1200-mile stop to replace the engine



ON A RACETRACK OR A BACK ROAD, IT'S A BEAUTIFULLY BALANCED AND HUGELY ENTERTAINING MACHINE.



oil and the transmission and differential fluids, the BMW's onboard computer determines the service schedule. It prompted us at 16,210 (engine-oil change), 27,769 (various inspections), and 29,248 miles (engine-oil change).

Due to an oversight, the M3 arrived at our offices without satellite radio installed, so we decided to add Sirius pay-radio service in the car at 13,264 miles—the unwed among us were suffering Howard Stern deprivation—which cost \$245 for wiring and programming.

At the 27,769-mile service stop, the M DCT

transmission was reprogrammed as part of a service bulletin that resulted from the “sudden loss of engine power when decelerating to a complete stop with light brake application.” M3 forums describe the sensation as being akin to the car stalling due to the transmission holding a higher gear than appropriate. In any event, this mechanical foul-up never bit us.

Over the M3's long stay, several drivers banged up the perilously low frontal underbody against curbs, inclined driveways, and irritating parking-lot barriers, to the point that

we had to replace the engine splash shield and other underbody parts at a cost of \$501. Other than this, the car's exterior (and interior) held up extremely well over its 17 months with us.

The only significant complaints involved the dual-clutch transmission. In automatic mode, it works remarkably well, and it was hard not to be awed by the speed of the shifts and its smoothness of operation. Indeed, technical director Dave VanderWerp observed that it “upshifts so smoothly under part throttle that it's easier to detect a shift from the change of

C/D FLEET FILES

2009 Acura TSX

20,315 miles · 26 observed mpg

The TSX is just over halfway through its tenure with us, and one logbook entry begs the question, “Why did the Honda Accord have to get so much bigger when the TSX seems like the perfect size?” Thousand-mile trips are not uncomfortable for the hefty or the lanky. The manual shifter is one of the best around in terms of feel, but some think the automatic is a better match for this light-on-torque engine. The fuel economy is somewhat disappointing considering a BMW 328i will match it, with more power and a more appealing rear-wheel-drive layout.



2009 Audi A4

8739 miles · 25 observed mpg

The A4, that original emblem of Audi's turnaround, hit our fleet at the end of July, and it didn't take us long to figure out that this car is a vast improvement over its predecessor. It's larger inside but drives more tidily, achieving the combination of chassis stability and control we take for granted in its main rival, the BMW 3-series. John Phillips opined, “It feels every inch as light and agile as the BMW, yet more luxurious inside and warmer throughout. Also, the 2.0T may be the best high-performance, small-displacement engine in the world.” Consider the gap narrowed.





the exhaust note than it is to feel it. Too bad," he went on, "that the lazy-throttle tip-in from standstill is so off-putting."

And near the end, the dual-clutch transmission was making clunks and groans. Assistant tech editor K.C. Colwell was adamant that the transmission had loosened up considerably. Twice while the M3 was parked facing downhill, the transmission slipped markedly when the driver was trying to back up. If the clutches need to be replaced, our local dealer quoted us \$3296 for the job! So far, none of the M3 forums has reported any issues with M DCT, save for the service bulletin already mentioned. Indeed, most owners seem besotted with the dual-clutch gearbox.

Most of the sentimental drivers on staff would have preferred a manual transmission in the M3, although the automatic function of the M DCT is good for mindless commuting. All around, this M3 was a far better experience than our long-term E46 M3 [March 2003]. Not only is the M3 dramatically improved in acceleration, braking, and skidpad grip, but it was utterly dependable. That 2001 M3 burned through 14 quarts of oil and used to sputter, stumble, and often stall on cold winter mornings. This M3 needed just two remedial quarts, the first of which wasn't added until 25,000 miles, and the car held a steady idle on even the bitterest cold starts. Based on our experience, the current M3 is the world's all-around best car for the money, although several staffers would have preferred to trade some of the coupe's looks for the added practicality of the sedan. Choices, choices. ■

BAUBLES AND BOLT-ONS

TRACK TIRES

Here are two truths about self-respecting M3 coupe owners: They would not even consider the optional sunroof that eliminates the distinctive carbon-fiber roof, and it's likely they will end up driving their cars at a racetrack. That second sure thing happened to us as pseudo-owners, and after a handful of laps we'd obliterated the tread on the stock Michelin Pilot Sport PS2 tires. They simply can't cope with the amount of heat generated by this 3600-pound thrill machine at its flaming limits.

So we went looking for stickier, street-legal track tires—commonly referred to as "R compound"—but finding them in either the M3's standard 18-inch size or the optional 19-inch dimension was difficult. However, Michelin has one, a BMW-specific version of its Pilot Sport Cup tires, in only the 19-inch size. In fact, these tires originated with the Euro-only, lightweight CSL edition of the previous-generation M3.

Available only as a replacement tire, this "Sport Cup +" version (fronts, \$353 each; rears, \$416) features additional grooving in the tread, which compromises stiffness to be friendlier in the rain (which it is) compared with an off-the-shelf Sport Cup. And these tires are also able to withstand higher temperatures than the stock PS2s. Unfortunately, skidpad results were no better with the Sport Cups (0.96 g), and braking (156 feet) was a bit worse.

We returned to the 1.9-mile GingerMan Raceway in South Haven, Michigan, where we'd chewed up our stock tires, with much improved results.

Although it didn't feel like there was a whole lot more stick in the corners (our best time was a 1:38.1), more important, lap times remained consistent. But after almost 1000 street miles and a couple of dozen hard laps at GingerMan, the fronts (see photo) had 2/32nds of an inch of tread left. The rears fared better, only burning through half (3/32-inch) of their tread. Even though the BMW-specific Sport Cups didn't outgrip the PS2s, having a tire that's consistent and lasts significantly longer during abusive lapping is indeed a boon for the track-rat M3 owner. —Dave VanderWerp



THE NUMBERS

2008 BMW M3

VEHICLE TYPE > front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 2-door coupe

PRICE AS TESTED > \$69,250 (base price: \$58,575)

ENGINE TYPE > DOHC 32-valve V-8,

aluminum block and heads, port fuel injection

DISPLACEMENT > 244 cu in, 3999cc

POWER (SAE NET) > 414 bhp @ 8300 rpm

TORQUE (SAE NET) > 295 lb-ft @ 3900 rpm

TRANSMISSION > 7-speed dual-clutch automated manual

DIMENSIONS: WHEELBASE > 108.7 in LENGTH > 181.8 in

WIDTH > 71.0 in HEIGHT > 55.8 in CURB WEIGHT > 3630 lb

PERFORMANCE NEW 40,000

ZERO TO 60 MPH > 4.3 sec 4.2 sec

ZERO TO 100 MPH > 9.9 sec 10.0 sec

ZERO TO 150 MPH > 26.0 sec 26.1 sec

STREET START,

5-60 MPH > 4.9 sec 5.0 sec

STANDING 1/4-MILE > 12.7 sec @ 113 mph 12.7 sec @ 113 mph

BRAKING, 70-0 MPH > 147 ft 156 ft

ROADHOLDING,

300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD > 0.96 g 0.97 g

TOP SPEED

(GOVERNOR LIMITED) > 161 mph 161 mph

EPA FUEL ECONOMY, CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 14/20 mpg

C/D-OBSERVED FUEL ECONOMY > 17 mpg

UNSCHEDULED OIL ADDITIONS > 2 qt

WARRANTY

4 years/50,000 miles bumper to bumper,
4 years/50,000 miles scheduled maintenance,
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4 years/unlimited miles roadside assistance

OPERATING COSTS (FOR 40,000 MILES)

SERVICE (4 SCHEDULED, 0 UNSCHEDULED) > \$0

NORMAL WEAR > \$1450 REPAIR > \$0

GASOLINE (@ \$2.91 PER GALLON) > \$6847

DAMAGE AND DESTRUCTION

FRONT SPLASH SHIELD/UNDERTRAY > \$501

LIFE EXPECTANCIES

(ESTIMATED FROM 40,000-MILE TEST)

TIRES > F: 35,000 miles R: 25,000 miles

BRAKE PADS > F: 75,000 miles R: 85,000 miles

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MODEL-YEAR CHANGES

2009 > none

2010 > automatic high-beams available, HD radio standard

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Code CDTPDF

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Plus Shipping & Handling
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SHORT TAKE



When you hear the words “Volkswagen” and “icon” in the same sentence, you’re likely to entertain images of the beloved Beetle.

Wrong icon. The Beetle, nearly 22 million of them, eclipsed the Ford Model T as history’s bestselling car, but the Golf puts the Bug on the trailer. Almost 27 million Golfs have been sold since 1974, according to VW. And here’s generation six, in showrooms now.

We hear you saying something like, “Looks pretty familiar.” The front end has been freshened; ditto the rear, which sports an enlarged hatch. But it takes a dedicated Golf watcher—or owner—to spot these distinctions. Dimensions are very close to those of the gen-five car—a smidge less front overhang, an inch more width, a slight increase in front track, unchanged height.





Audi S5 Cabriolet

The complete convertible: AWD, blown V-6, big zoot.

QUICK TAKE



However, there's something new under the hood, or at least new to the gen-six U.S. Golf: VW's 2.0-liter, direct-injection turbo-diesel (TDI) four. (The standard engine is still the ho-hum 170-hp inline-five.) The Golf TDI, which produces 140 horses and 236 pound-feet of torque, is a shade slower than the Golf 2.5 regardless of transmission—six-speed manual (standard) or optional six-speed, dual-clutch DSG automated manual. We recorded 8.0 seconds to 60 mph, a little quicker than the long-term Jetta TDI currently in our test fleet (thanks to a curb weight—3186 pounds—that's 167 pounds lower).

In any case, fuel economy is the TDI's bragging point: 30 mpg city and 41 highway for the manual, 30 and 42, respectively, with the DSG. We averaged 34 mpg.

You'd expect that benefit, of course. What you might not expect is a high fun-to-drive index. Diesel buyers get the benefit of firmer suspension tuning and more precise steering, yielding turn-in and transient responses that are all but indistinguishable from those delivered by a GTI, the performance prince of Golfs. Okay, the GTI hustles to 60 almost two seconds quicker. But think of it this way: The Golf TDI teaches the art of momentum maintenance. And unlike GTI owners, you'll never have to replace the spark plugs.

There are other pluses. Though all Golfs are improved in terms of fit, finish, and interior detail, the TDI provides better materials inside than the standard car, plus bucket seats that feel identical to those of the GTI (great support and comfort) and a steering wheel that's as pleasant to grip as your senior-prom date. Maybe more.

There are also demerits. You pay a hefty premium for that diesel—\$4500. And watch out for those options. The DSG adds \$1100, a sunroof is another grand, adaptive xenon headlights are \$700, a 300-watt audio upgrade is \$476, and a Cold-Weather package (heated seats, heated headlight-washer nozzles) adds \$225. Oh, yeah, can't forget Bluetooth connectivity (\$199), a required option. How do you say "oxymoron" in German?

We wound up with a \$26,440 as-tested price tag, which does seem a bit dear. Then again, diesel thrift doesn't get much more affordable, and for the money, it doesn't get to be any more fun to drive.

TAN FASTER, EVEN IN WINTER? Only Audi and Bentley make all-wheel-drive convertibles with room for four adults. Audi's S5 cabriolet ditches the coupe's V-8 and steel roof and gains a supercharged V-6 and 1 mpg in our testing, for 16. Most luxury convertibles use folding hard-tops, but they bloat hindquarters and gobble cargo room. The S5's cloth roof facilitates its trim styling and spacious rear seat and trunk.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE? The blown V-6 has tons of usable torque, though we miss the V-8's speedboat burble. While the S5 cabriolet grips and accelerates nearly as well as the S4 sedan (with which it shares the V-6), the drop-top feels less athletic. Its dual-clutch gearbox can be sluggish off the line, and handling is dulled by 300 or so extra pounds of body reinforcements and top motors. The upsides of the extra weight are a quiet cabin and amazing structural rigidity, which allows a smooth, quiver-free ride.

WHAT'S IT COST? To the \$59,075 base price, you can add options such as navigation, neck heaters, radar cruise control, a torque-vectoring rear differential, and adaptive damping. Loaded, an S5 cabrio rings up at more than \$75,000, which is still a fraction of a Bentley's price. —MIKE DUSHANE

THE NUMBERS

VEHICLE TYPE > front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 3-door hatchback
PRICE AS TESTED > \$26,440 (base price: \$22,939)

ENGINE TYPE > turbocharged and intercooled SOHC 16-valve diesel inline-4, iron block and aluminum head, direct fuel injection
DISPLACEMENT > 120 cu in, 1968cc
POWER (SAE NET) > 140 bhp @ 4000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET) > 236 lb-ft @ 1750 rpm
TRANSMISSION > 6-speed dual-clutch automated manual

DIMENSIONS:

WHEELBASE > 101.5 in LENGTH > 165.4 in
WIDTH > 70.3 in HEIGHT > 58.2 in
CURB WEIGHT > 3186 lb

C/D TEST RESULTS

ZERO TO 60 MPH > 8.0 sec

ZERO TO 100 MPH > 24.5 sec

ZERO TO 110 MPH > 33.4 sec

STREET START, 5–60 MPH > 8.7 sec

STANDING 1/4-MILE > 16.2 sec @ 85 mph

TOP SPEED (GOVERNOR LIMITED) > 125 mph

BRAKING, 70–0 MPH > 172 ft

ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD* > 0.83 g

FUEL ECONOMY:

EPA CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 30/42 mpg

C/D OBSERVED > 34 mpg

*Stability-control-inhibited.

THE NUMBERS

POWERTRAIN > supercharged DOHC 24-valve 3.0-liter V-6; 333 hp, 325 lb-ft; 7-speed dual-clutch automated manual
EPA CITY/HIGHWAY > 17/26 mpg

C/D TEST RESULTS

ZERO TO 60 MPH > 5.1 sec

STANDING 1/4-MILE > 13.6 sec @ 103 mph

BRAKING, 70–0 MPH > 161 ft

ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD > 0.91 g

2011 Infiniti M37/M56 by STEVE SILER

The M has officially arrived—and sticks with the athletic cut.

PREVIEW



Infiniti has styled itself as the Japanese BMW, but for most of the two decades the brand has been around, its products haven't measured up to those from the German company. Recently, though, we've watched the G sedan and coupe evolve into some mighty formidable competition for the 3-series, while the current M is a multiple comparison-test winner in the medium-size, luxury-sport segment, which includes the Audi A6, the BMW 5-series, the Lexus GS, and the Mercedes E-class, among others. In its most recent comparison, though, the M was beginning to show its age. Now, with the 2011 M37 and M56, Infiniti has decided to scale up the G's successful recipe by creating perhaps a more compelling alternative to the top-finishing A6 and 5-series.

For starters, the M embraces the G's organic styling themes. Sport models get a slightly different front end and wear larger, 20-inch wheels, but regardless of trim, it's safe to say the M has officially arrived.

Ditto the interior. The M's cabin is clearly more spacious and better equipped, but the G's sense of athletic-cut tailoring remains. As with the previous M, the new model is still no paragon of ergonomic simplicity. Aesthetically, though, it is spot-on gorgeous. The only bones we found pickworthy are a dull cluster design and the contrived "breeze mode" of the available "Forest Air" HVAC system, which blows air through the vents at random speeds to mimic natural breezes.

We sampled a couple of engineering prototypes recently in California, hitting the road first in an M56. Powered by a heavily modified, direct-injected version of the 5.6-liter V-8 truck engine found in the QX56, the Nissan Armada, and the Titan pickup—but making 420 horsepower and 417 pound-feet of torque—the M56 both replaces the 325-hp M45 and becomes the most powerful vehicle in Infiniti's lineup. Unfortunately, from our first standing-start launch, we were let down by the prototype's lack of off-the-line enthusiasm, as if 50 to 75 horses and pound-feet were lost somewhere between paper and pavement. A passionless exhaust note was equally disappointing.

Far more refined was an M37x prototype, powered by a 330-hp, 3.7-liter V-6 with 270 pound-feet of torque, more or less identical to that found under the hood of the G37, and fitted with all-wheel drive (as is the M56x). As with its smaller FM-platform mate, the V-6 and its accompanying seven-speed automatic are a

smart match. The M37's lower weight and delightfully natural steering—especially compared with the M56 Sport's four-wheel-steering system that varies the steering ratio and can turn the rear wheels in the same direction as the fronts by as much as one degree—made it our favorite by far.

But that could change by the time the new M hits U.S. dealerships in late March or early April. (Infiniti's first hybrid, based on the V-6 M, is to follow a year later.) According to company spokesman Kyle Bazemore, Infiniti is making numerous changes to the M56 that address our chief areas of concern: V-8 exhaust note, throttle tip-in, and shift mapping. About the four-wheel steering, however, Bazemore was uncertain.

So have the A6 and 5-series been served? We'll have to wait for a drive in the final product before we can say for certain.

THE NUMBERS

VEHICLE TYPE > front-engine, rear- or 4-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door sedan
ESTIMATED BASE PRICE > \$47,500–\$57,500
ENGINES > DOHC 24-valve 3.7-liter V-6, 330 hp, 270 lb-ft; DOHC 32-valve 5.6-liter V-8, 420 hp, 417 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION > 7-speed automatic with manumatic shifting
DIMENSIONS:
WHEELBASE > 114.2 in LENGTH > 194.7 in
WIDTH > 72.6 in HEIGHT > 59.1–59.6 in
CURB WEIGHT > 3950–4200 lb
PERFORMANCE (C/D EST):
ZERO TO 60 MPH > 4.7–6.3 sec
STANDING 1/4-MILE > 13.3–15.0 sec
PROJECTED FUEL ECONOMY (C/D EST):
EPA CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 16-18/22-26 mpg



Kia Forte Koup SX by DAVE VANDERWERP

👍 *Standout good looks, best-in-class performance, surprisingly large back seat.*
 👎 *Rough ride, touchy throttle, limited headroom.*

SHORT TAKE



In transforming the handsome new Forte sedan into a positively stylish coupe—the company's first two-door—Kia seems to be now fully realizing the benefits of wooing away Audi designer Peter Schreyer in 2006 and making good on its “The Power to Surprise” slogan.

Some might question the difficulty of making a positive styling statement in the often overwrought compact segment—have you seen the new Mazda 3?—but impressively, the Forte's makeover goes deeper. For one, it hasn't squandered much of the sedan's back-seat space, a common coupe drawback. In fact, despite the marginal headroom that comes along with the appealingly squashed roofline,

the Forte Koup has as much rear space as the vastly larger Honda Accord coupe. How's that for a packaging upset?

The interior isn't as fetching as the exterior, but it's ergonomically sound and rendered in agreeable, if hard, plastics. The only remaining chintzy pieces are the greasy-looking turn-signal and wiper stalks. And the standard steering-wheel-mounted buttons for the stereo, cruise control, and easy-to-use Bluetooth operate with a precision that wouldn't be out of place in a car costing two or three times as much. Drivers over six feet tall will want to say no to the sunroof option and thereby maximize the Koup's limited headroom; we also recommend sticking with the grippy base cloth seats and forgoing the slippery leather.

All Koups have lots of standard equipment, including six airbags, stability control, power locks and windows, iPod integration, and Sirius satellite radio. Stepping up from the base \$17,290 EX to the \$18,390 SX yields a larger, 173-hp 2.4-liter that's far smoother than the base 156-hp 2.0-liter (which gets pretty gritty near its redline) and an additional ratio in each

of the available transmissions—a six-speed manual or a five-speed automatic.

With the manual, the SX has class-leading acceleration: 0 to 60 mph in 7.1 seconds. And despite the fact it's one of the last to retain a torsion-beam rear suspension—along with an extremely disproportionate weight distribution (64 percent of the Koup's 2933 pounds are on the front wheels)—the Koup is reasonably competent, and understeer at the limit is merely deliberate, not debilitating. Skidpad grip of 0.89 g on all-season Goodyear Eagle LS2s places the Koup solidly ahead of the compact pack, as does a firm brake pedal that produces stops from 70 mph in 171 feet. But after more than a decade of Kia floppiness, the Koup's ride is too stiff, as if firmness has been confused with sportiness. Similarly, the throttle is jumpy, making smooth starts laborious. The directness of the six-speed shifter is a big improvement over the Soul's sloppier five-speed, but its effort is a tad high. The steering has appropriate heft and a solid on-center feel, although it suffers from vicious kickback in bumpy corners and is not as fluid as a Mazda 3's, a complaint that pretty much applies to the entire driving experience.

While not quite as composed overall as the class mainstays, the Forte Koup's best-in-class looks, horsepower, and performance are justification for spelling Koup with a “c.”

THE NUMBERS

VEHICLE TYPE > front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 2-door coupe
 PRICE AS TESTED > \$18,990
 (base price: \$18,390)
 ENGINE TYPE > DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and head, port fuel injection
 DISPLACEMENT > 144 cu in, 2360cc
 POWER (SAE NET) > 173 bhp @ 6000 rpm
 TORQUE (SAE NET) > 168 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
 TRANSMISSION > 6-speed manual
 DIMENSIONS:
 WHEELBASE > 104.3 in LENGTH > 176.4 in
 WIDTH > 69.5 in HEIGHT > 55.1 in
 CURB WEIGHT > 2933 lb

C/D TEST RESULTS

ZERO TO 60 MPH > 7.1 sec
 ZERO TO 100 MPH > 20.3 sec
 ZERO TO 120 MPH > 32.7 sec
 STREET START, 5–60 MPH > 7.8 sec
 STANDING 1/4-MILE > 15.7 sec @ 91 mph
 TOP SPEED (GOVERNOR LIMITED) > 132 mph
 BRAKING, 70–0 MPH > 171 ft
 ROADHOLDING, 300-FT-DIA SKIDPAD > 0.89 g
 FUEL ECONOMY:
 EPA CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 22/32 mpg
C/D OBSERVED > 22 mpg



BMW ActiveHybrid X6 by MIKE SUTTON

BMW hybridizes its twin-turbo mall shark. We plant a couple trees.

PREVIEW



Although BMW initially shunned hybrids in favor of clean-diesel technology, its first full hybrid, the ActiveHybrid X6, now joins the electrically assisted segment as the most powerful of its kind.

Based on the X6 xDrive50i and its 400-hp, twin-turbocharged 4.4-liter V-8, the ActiveHybrid adds a nickel-metal hydride battery and a two-mode, electronic, continuously variable transmission—co-developed with General Motors and the former Daimler-Chrysler—for a total output of 480 horsepower and 575 pound-feet of torque.

On the surface, the ActiveHybrid feels much like the nonhybrid X6, which is fast, agile, and immensely capable despite weighing in excess of 5200 pounds. But it's far from the most sensible package on which to base a hybrid.

While the ActiveHybrid is quick, BMW

says the added 400-plus pounds of hybrid running gear (which brings the total to about 5700 pounds) actually make this X6 a tick slower to 60 mph than the xDrive50i, which we've clocked at 5.1 seconds. And compared with that model's EPA city/highway ratings of 13/18 mpg, the hybrid's 17/19-mpg figures are token improvements, especially if you exploit the prodigious passing power.

Accented by the hybrid's angular hood bulge and aero-tuned 20-inch wheels, the X6's unique styling looked good during our cruise of downtown Miami, where the ActiveHybrid frequently moved along quietly on electrons alone. Jumping on the accelerator, however, occasionally caused the powertrain to pause while the computers decided how to route all the juice. The electric steering also was lighter than we'd prefer, and the regenerative brakes felt rubbery and isolated.

While this is one of the best-driving full hybrids and features a fair amount of standard luxury equipment, prices start at \$89,725, or about 12 grand more than a comparably equipped xDrive50i. For those few folks who crave a large, immensely powerful crossover and believe that such a purchase could actually help out Mother Earth, BMW's first hybrid fills the bill. For us, we'll plant a couple of trees and take the 555-hp X6 M for the same money. ■

THE NUMBERS

VEHICLE TYPE > front-engine, 4-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 5-door wagon
 BASE PRICE > \$89,725
 ENGINE TYPE > twin-turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 32-valve 4.4-liter V-8, 400 hp, 450 lb-ft; 2 AC synchronous electric motors, 91 and 86 hp, 192 and 206 lb-ft; combined system, 480 hp, 575 lb-ft
 TRANSMISSION > continuously variable automatic with 4 fixed ratios and manual shifting
 DIMENSIONS:
 WHEELBASE > 115.5 in LENGTH > 192.0 in WIDTH > 78.1 in HEIGHT > 66.5 in CURB WEIGHT > 5700 lb
 PERFORMANCE (C/D EST):
 ZERO TO 60 MPH > 5.2 sec
 ZERO TO 100 MPH > 13.4 sec
 STANDING 1/4-MILE > 14.0 sec
 TOP SPEED (GOVERNOR LIMITED) > 130 mph
 FUEL ECONOMY:
 EPA CITY/HIGHWAY DRIVING > 17/19 mpg

● **Twin-Turbo V-8:** All-electric ancillaries give start-stop capability to the direct-injected, twin-turbocharged 4.4-liter V-8.

● **Two-Mode Transmission:** Continuously variable operation, three planetary gearsets, and two electric motors make for four fixed ratios, seven driver-selectable "gears," and additional efficiency both at city and highway speeds.



● **Energy Storage:** The 2.4-kilowatt-hour, nickel-metal hydride battery recoups energy from regenerative braking and can propel the X6 hybrid up to 37 mph, or over a distance of 1.6 miles.

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Alpinestars Tech 1-Z

High-end shoes such as these Tech 1-Zs use choice materials—check the kangaroo-leather uppers—and feature neat detailing like the pull-up speed laces. The thin soles make for especially good pedal feel, and the boots are so light and supple overall that it almost seems as if you're not wearing them. They meet the latest FIA and SFI safety standards and are available in black or black and gold, in men's sizes 5 to 13. The only drawbacks: the price and their relative narrowness.

(\$289.95; 310-891-0222;
www.alpinestars.com)





Sparco Formula ADV

This Italian company's latest top-end boots feature ultrathin, oil-resistant soles with contrasting carbon-fiber-look leather and suede on the uppers. The shoes are light and give terrific feel but were the tightest across our feet of the four we tried. Plus, there's

no neat way of hiding the laces. The Sparcos come in black, blue, red, silver, and white, in sizes 7 to 13. FIA and SFI compliant. (\$269.00; 800-224-7223; www.sparcousa.com)

7

RJS Mid-Top Driving Shoes

We were surprised by all the goodness in these budget boots, which are light and comfortable and feature a Velcro strap that covers the laces. The RJSs have suede uppers with an Arimand Kevlar lining and comply with an SFI 3.3/5 rating. They come in black, red, and blue, in sizes 5 to 15. Unlike the Sparco and Alpinestars shoes, the RJSs are sized for wider feet. Unfortunately, they have all the style of a sweater vest.

(\$85.64; 248-548-5727; www.rjsracing.com)

8



WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

The thinner the sole, the better the pedal feel, the greater the control. But thin soles are less durable, so most track-day drivers, if they wear racing shoes all day and wander around the pits in them, will likely go for a thicker-soled option such as a Piloti. We recommend track shoes with a flame-resistant lining, which is mandatory for most race series. People who race older cars should go for traditional leather uppers—in our experience, fluid spills are readily absorbed by suede boots. Also, for those racing overseas, make sure your boots have an FIA rating. Know that European shoes—Alpinestars, OMP, and Sparco, for example—are generally narrower than those from U.S. makers, although Sparco does make a wider budget shoe called “Race.” —MARK GILLIES

Oakley Race Mid

The Oakleys provide a great compromise of looks, price, and comfort. They will also appeal to the track-day driver who wants a slightly thicker, more durable sole. The uppers are made from suede with Oakley's patented CarbonX flame-resistant lining. Available in blue, black, and red, in sizes 6 to 13, the boots meet FIA and SFI specs.

Just one complaint: There is no Velcro strap to keep the laces out of the way. (\$127.50; 800-431-1439; www.oakley.com)

9



TEST VENUE: These shoes were battle proven at the Goodwood Revival and during our Lightning Lap event at Virginia International Raceway.

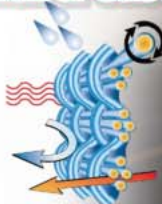
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Tommy Ivo

➔ *An actor from age nine until leaving Hollywood 20 years later to go drag racing, Ivo became the first to cover the quarter-mile in less than six seconds. Retired from racing in 1982 and now 73, he reflects on his career.*

C/D: We're talking to you because of your racing background, but we can't ignore the show-biz part of your life or why you're known as "TV" Tommy Ivo. Your family moved from Denver to Hollywood when you were a kid, and you were in the movies—everything from *Sunset Boulevard* to *The Babe Ruth Story*. Then TV—lots of westerns, plus *Donna Reed*, *My Three Sons*, *Mike Hammer*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Lassie*.

TI: I could sing and tap-dance—all kids sang and tap-danced then, instead of playing guitars like they do now—and people told my mother, "You ought to take him to Hollywood." So she tried to get little Tommy in the movies. I had some acting ability, and I progressed—from playing an orphan and a cripple when I was younger to playing the 10-thumbed bumbling boyfriend.

C/D: In 1952, you discovered cars, and drag racing, which was just getting started.

TI: Drag racers had a pretty bad reputation—they were the kids with foxtails waving from their antennas and mud flaps on their cars, trying to kill everybody in town as they raced away from traffic lights.

C/D: In 1961, you had a starring role in an ABC series called *Margie*. And that's the year *Hot Rod* decided to put you on the cover with your now-legendary four-engine dragster. And it changed everything.

TI: That's what got me fired from drag racing. *Hot Rod* took the car down to the *Margie* set for the photo, and when the producers saw what I was racing, you could hear doors slamming from one side of the studio to the other as they ran in to call the lawyers. When the *Margie*

show was over, I said, "That's it—they're not going to stop me from driving again." I'd acted for 20 years—been in about a hundred movies, a couple hundred TV shows—and it was old hat, but the drag racing was really bitchin'.

C/D: You toured as a kind of a millionaire playboy movie-star character, battling the blue-collar boys like *Don Garlits*.

TI: I'd walk out of the trailer with my white gloves and see if the car was clean or not. They never saw me rolling around in the muck and the mud and the dirt in the middle of the night fixing the durned thing.

C/D: That four-engine, four-wheel-drive dragster, even today, is a marvel.

TI: We never put them on dynos in those days, but it probably made between 1600 and 1800 horsepower for all four engines. Naturally aspirated motors running on gasoline because, at the time, the NHRA banned nitro. Two Buick V-8s on each side, making essentially a pair of V-16s.

C/D: That car could not have been fun to drive. It weighed 4000 pounds, and it essentially ended your career when you hit a fairly benign bump and the jolt broke your back.

TI: That thing has been nothing but bad luck for me, but it's my signature car. Of the 36 cars I built and raced, I hated that one the most. It was like driving a 200-mph Sherman tank.

C/D: What did you like the best?

TI: The front-engined dragsters. At Long Beach, we smoked the tires from one end of the strip to the other, and the smoke would be all kinds of colors. That was in the Sixties, and I'd say, "Far out, man! Look at that!"

C/D: Even off the track, you were ahead of

your time. You toured for a while in a huge truck that had glass sides, showing off your race car inside, all lit up at night, and you had a Chevrolet Corvette push car that sat on top of the trailer.

TI: Whatever it took to keep fans and promoters interested—I'd show up in a car with one motor, two motors, I'd sit in front of the motor, I'd be behind the motor, I'd bring a jet car, a Funny Car, and to me, that was part of the excitement—every year we'd come home from touring and say, "Oh, boy, oh, boy, what are we gonna do next?" I know I shot myself in the foot playing the movie star because now I don't always get a whole bunch of credit for putting all that together.

C/D: So if you had it to do over...

TI: I was pretty musically inclined—I played the piano, the marimba, the drums, the steel guitar. Had I not gotten into the movies or went drag racing, I think I would have gotten involved with rock 'n' roll, and I can't help but wonder how that would have gone. When I was nine years old, I did a play with Boris Karloff, and he told my mother, "I don't know what he's going to do when he grows up, but whatever it is, he's gonna be good at it." But I wouldn't change much. For the first part of my career, I got to ride with Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, and swing through the jungle on vines with Bomba the Jungle Boy...

C/D: ... and for the last part, you were good enough at drag racing to be inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2005.

TI: Really, now, how much better does it get? —STEVEN COLE SMITH

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